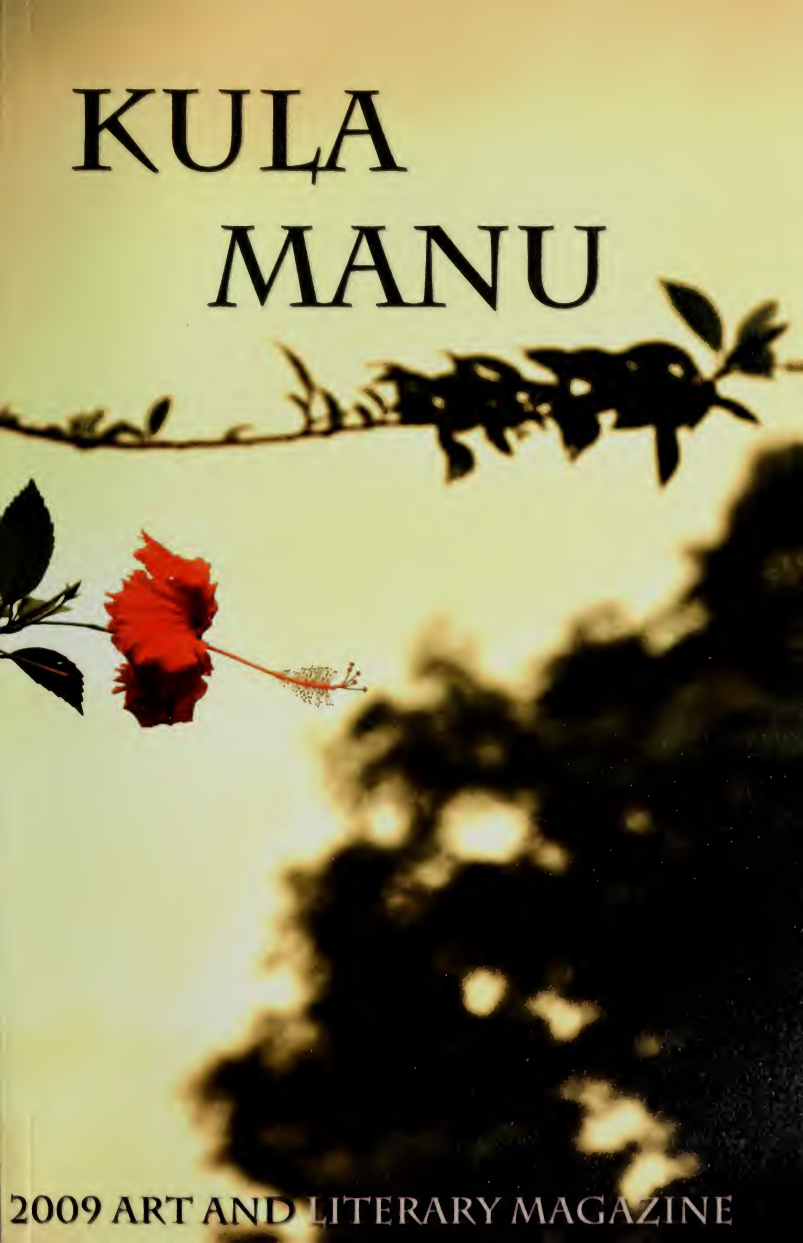


KULA MANU

A photograph of a red hibiscus flower and a dark, silhouetted branch against a bright, yellowish background. The flower is on the left, and the branch extends across the top. The background is a bright, yellowish light, possibly a sunset or sunrise, with dark, silhouetted foliage in the lower right.

2009 ART AND LITERARY MAGAZINE



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Kula

Manu

2009

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY HAWAII

Cover art, "Breaking Free " by Megham Seely

The ideas, themes, and perspectives expressed in the Kula Manu are those of the authors themselves, and are not necessarily in line with the views of the editors of the Kula Manu, Brigham Young University, or The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints.

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A Grave Situation

Lee Bungard

I went to the funeral of Tess Webster, with the intent of singing *I Stand All Amazed* as a solo. I love that hymn.

I stand all amazed at the love Jesus offers me,
Confused at the grace that so fully he proffers me
I tremble to know that for me he was crucified,
That for me, a sinner, he suffered, he bled and died.

Oh, it is wonderful that he should care for me
Enough to die for me!
Oh, it is wonderful, wonderful to me!

Tess's husband Clarence had asked me to sing a solo, but he didn't mention

which song. While I had initially intended to sing *I Stand All Amazed*, I changed my

mind after hearing some of the things that were said about Tess during the funeral.

The room was decorated beautifully. There were numerous flower arrangements from friends who lived all over the country. There was a large display of photos from different times and places from Tess's life. Some of the pictures showed her with her husband and children. Some of them showed her digging in her flower garden. One of the pictures had been taken on a boat.

Janette Salmon played the prelude music. It was so beautiful and peaceful. She studied music all her life, and I would be hard-pressed to recall a time when she ever missed a single note. She really knows what she is doing. She moved out of our congregation and into a different one about a year earlier, so I don't get to hear her perform much. I miss having her as our organist.

I sat up on the rostrum to direct the congregational music, as well as to sing my solo.

We opened with the hymn *Abide With Me*. Someone gave a prayer. A couple of people spoke before the formal eulogy.

During the eulogy, Tess Webster's daughter Karen spoke about the wonderful things that her mother had loved so much during her 76 years of life. She talked about her mother's flower gardens. She talked about how much her mother loved traveling (Tess and Clarence had been on nine cruises to the Caribbean and in the Mediterranean). Karen talked about her mother's love for animals. She talked about her love for music, and it turns out that Tess Webster was quite talented, musically. When she was in her teens, she was accepted to Juilliard but had to decline due to the death of her father. Can you imagine having an opportunity to be trained at Juilliard, but having to give it all up? She stayed behind to work and help the struggling family. Tess was a good woman.

It was getting closer to the time when I would sing my solo. The hymn that I had picked is such a wonderful, powerful hymn. Nevertheless, it didn't quite feel right. David DuBois, the man who was conducting the funeral, had suggested that I sing *O My Father*, but I didn't think I was up to that. *O My Father* is a pretty demanding piece. I really wanted to sing *I Stand All Amazed*.

But as Karen described all those wonderful things about her mother to the congregation, I realized how appropriate another hymn, *God Is Love*, would be. I walked up to the microphone after Karen was finished, and I asked the congregation to listen for the things that Tess Webster loved so much during her life.

Earth with her ten thousand flowers,
Air, with all its beams and showers,
Heaven's infinite expanse,
Sea's resplendent countenance –
All around and all above
Bear this record: God is Love.

I wanted the congregation to think of Tess when I sang about ten thousand flowers; Karen had spoken of how her mother loved to work in her gardens.

I wanted them to think of Tess when I sang about the sea's resplendent countenance; she and Clarence had been on all those cruises.

A bird is mentioned in one of the verses, and that beautifully reflected Karen's comments about how much her mother loved animals.

Sacred music is mentioned:
Sacred songs, beneath, above,
Have one chorus: God is Love.

Each of the integral parts of the hymn, though they were talking about God, also mirrored the comments that had been made about Tess Webster and I felt so pleased that I had chosen to sing this solo instead of my beloved *I Stand All Amazed*.

I saw some people dabbing their eyes. I knew they felt what I was feeling.

There was a concluding speaker, and then I directed everyone in all six verses of the hymn, *Come Follow Me*. It was a beautiful way to pay tribute to a wonderful lady.

The service ended, and I took the opportunity to talk to Janette. I really like her. I told her a few things about the music in our congregation. I told her about our congregation's organist (Peter Liley) and our chorister (Bianca Little). I wasn't exactly nice in terms of what I had to say. In regards to losing Janette as our organist, I said, "What a loss. Peter Liley really sucks!" That wasn't the nicest thing to say, especially just after a funeral that had been so beautiful and peaceful.

I told her very bluntly about both Peter and Bianca's musical styles (or rather the lack thereof). I told her how bad Bianca is when she directs, so serious, never a smile, and that she can only direct in 3/4 time. It

doesn't matter what the time signature is for a particular song. The lady can only direct in 3/4 time!

Making a joke, I told Janette I thought Bianca was improving. I mentioned that I had almost caught her making a facial expression. I don't know how they select someone to become the new chorister, but I told Janette that it seemed like selecting someone who was *alive* should be one of the criteria.

I told her how bad I thought Peter stunk at playing the organ: how he played everything in one volume and at one tempo, regardless of the mood of the piece. I told her that he was improving as well; I caught him playing some chords correctly just the other day.

I told Janette what a loss it was when she moved away. At this time, someone walked into the chapel. Due to this uninvited intruder's presence, I stopped badmouthing the musical help of my congregation.

The man didn't stay long. He came up to where we were standing and reached for a tape recorder that was sitting to the side of the podium. I commented to him that I didn't even know it was there. He turned off the recorder and pulled out a tape. I thought that was kind of odd – to have taped a funeral service. I thought that it might be nice for the widower to have the nice things that people had said during the service as a remembrance of his dearly departed Tess. Even so, I thought it was kind of odd.

At first it didn't even occur to me that he now had a tape recording which had all of my insults on it. He walked away from us toward the back of the chapel. Only when he exited the chapel did I realize the full scope of what would eventually happen. A little old man in mourning would one day soon, perhaps that very day, at the end of hearing a recording of wonderful accolades towards his wife, at the end of hearing beautifully peaceful music and my solo, he would have to listen to my rude griping about the inept musicians in my congregation. How horrible that would be for him. I had to get that tape back!

I ran out into the hallway, but I didn't see the man. I ran down an adjoining hallway, but he wasn't there either. I looked out of one of the glass doors and I saw the motorcade preparing to leave the parking lot on its way to the cemetery. I ran outside just in time to see the lead vehicles turn onto Bermuda Avenue.

I ran back to where my car was and I got in. I honked and passed most of the funeral procession out on Vine Street, weaving in and out of the cars. I was desperate to get that tape before the little old man listened to it. I was hoping he wouldn't put it in the limousine's tape player to listen to it while he was being taken to the cemetery.

I followed the man to the gravesite. I made somewhat of a disturbance as he and other family members got out of the limo. I made some lame excuse as to why I needed to hear the tape and I finally got it from him, with the promise that it would be returned in just a few minutes. I went over to my car to listen to it and to erase my rude comments.

My car wasn't that far away from the gravesite. Since I had passed all the others on the way to the cemetery, I was quite close to the area. I turned the car on so I could place the tape in the tape player and hear how bad I sounded, insulting the musical help in our church. I hoped that somehow my comments hadn't been recorded.

Just then, Janette's husband Mike (who would preside at this short gravesite service and the dedication of Tess' grave) heard his wife's lovely organ music playing on my tape player. I had forwarded the tape to where Janette was playing the postlude music at the end of the service back at the chapel. Mike asked me to turn the volume of the music all the way up as a prelude to this gravesite service we were about to have. He said that would be an appropriate start to what was about to transpire.

I was happy to do that since I knew I could just turn the volume back down when the tape got to the part where I was being rude.

The windows of my car were cracked a bit, as was the sunroof. The music was turned up all the way. The music could be heard very well from the gravesite.

I was sitting in the car, listening to the music, while others gathered around the casket. I stepped out of the car to take my jacket off. Inadvertently, I swung my arm toward the door of the car as I removed my jacket. The door slammed shut, locking the keys inside.

Mike prepared to start the gravesite service as the music came to an end. By that point, I was in a panic. I realized there were only a few seconds of organ music left on the tape. I ran around the car, sticking my fingers in the cracks of the windows as far as they would go.

I was jumping around the car, trying to get something to open. I kicked the tires and slapped at the windows in a vain attempt to get in, as the bereaved family looked at me, wondering what I was doing.

Finally, the music stopped playing. I froze as I looked toward the gravesite full of mourning people. Mike started the service.

"Dearly Beloved, we are gathered here today to mourn the loss of a sister . . ." The tape responded, "What a loss! Peter Liley really sucks."

All eyes looked toward me. Everyone thought I had just randomly shouted that out. I assured them that it wasn't me. I said, "At least it wasn't me *live*." Then I realized the poor wording, them standing there about to bury the dead, me stating that they aren't listening to me "*live*." I tried to clarify by stating, "I mean *live* as opposed to being tape recorded. Not *live* as in me being not dead . . . like her." I sensed that the attempt at clarification didn't work that well.

Mike continued: "We've suffered a great loss . . ."

"We really lost a great organist. Peter Liley don't play worth diddly squat . . ."

Again, the people at the gravesite thought I was shouting this bit of information at them. One of the representatives from the funeral home came over and told me to calm down and to shut up. I told him that it wasn't me that was talking, or rather, it wasn't me right then. To clarify for him, I then told him that it *was* me, but it was me recorded, and I couldn't shut up.

Bits of unintelligible information were then broadcast over all of Shady Acres Memorial Gardens.

"She can only direct in three four." "She doesn't know her treble from her bass." "Why did they ever choose her? I guess you take what you can get."

Mike Salmon tried to divert everyone's attention back to the service that he was trying to conduct. He said a few kind words about Tess Webster's demeanor: the way she talked, the way she always smiled at everyone.

My recorded voice shouted, "I almost caught her making a facial expression."

Everyone looked at me while Mike spoke about how she lived life to the fullest, never feeling sorry for herself, always being so full of energy and vitality until the end.

The voice from within the car shouted "She can't even keep up with Peter!" I heard someone quietly ask, "Who's Peter?"

As another one of the church leaders tried to help me open my car up, Mike went on to say that Tess Webster was everyone's friend. He said, "She had such a wonderful charisma. Everyone was drawn towards her. Everyone wanted to be Tess Webster's friend, and everyone wanted Tess to be their friend."

"... you'd think they would have picked someone who was alive!" The looks of disgust I received! I couldn't believe all this was happening.

In trying to salvage what was supposed to be a dignified service, Mike tried, once again, to tell the little group about some of Tess' qualities.

"She delighted everyone with her musical talents ..."

"She couldn't carry a tune if it was in a bucket."

Finally, I just threw a rock through one of the windows. I reached through the window into the car to turn off the tape player. Inadvertently, I bumped the car out of park. As it pulled forward toward the casket, I was helpless to stop it.

The car slowly pulled forward, closer and closer to the casket. It was on a direct course and it began to pick up speed. As it got closer, people had to scramble to get out of the way. People were running and screaming while I was shouting at them to move, and I was trying to apologize. But of course people couldn't hear me, because I was also shouting things like, "You know, they both really suck at what they do. Some people just shouldn't be allowed to breed."

The car bumped into the casket, knocking it off the stand, dumping it unceremoniously into the grave. The front of the car went in on top of it.

At this point, the grieving little old man finally lost his patience and spoke up. "What do ya think you're doing? What's wrong with you?"

I opened my mouth to speak, but before I could even begin to form words that might offer any semblance of a reasonable explanation for this catastrophe, the voice from within the car called out, "I didn't even know that was there"

I Am Salisha Allard Do You Know Me?

Salisha Allard

When I look in a mirror, I see an African descendant girl with stunted black hair, and a wide smile that reminds me of my mother. I wonder, when others look at me, if they know that my hair shows I'm too poor to afford the constant treatment to maintain long, healthy hair, or that my deep dimples sometimes conceal depression and turmoil? Do they see that in order to understand me they'd have to know about my past life, future dreams, and aspirations? Growing up as a poor orphan in Grenada, I was denied a solid foundation on which to build personal and social success; however, when I converted to the Gospel, I was able to improve my self-esteem, education, and social life.

As I was growing up, I was extremely poor. I wore ragged clothes and walked bare-foot everywhere, besides to school and to the city/town. My school uniforms were always my best clothes, even though they were burnt, off-colored, and crazily stitched. My only pair of shoes were always laughing (open at the front), but, thankfully, were held in place by a piece of cloth or string. I had very little food to eat. On good days, I ate dried cow-tripe soup with provisions (yams, sweet potatoes), given to me by the neighbor; and on bad days, I ate stale rice tea (overnight rice mixed with hot water and sugar). Most of the time, I did not have any food to eat, so I ate mud and sugar and drank water. At the tender age of nine, my mother was diagnosed with breast cancer, and spent most of her last days in the hospital. For this reason, I was forced to become a young mother. My baby sister was only one year old, and I had to tend her in our mother's absence. I fed her with sweet water tea (cold water mixed with sugar) and leftover bread and noodles from neighbors. Everyone saw me as an object and treated me like nobody. It hurt me badly to see no one stretch forth a helping hand to assist me in tending my baby sister and six-year-old brother. As a result, I began hating myself (because everyone hated me). I paid very little attention to myself and those around me. For example, I walked the streets with the same dirty clothes, day after day, not worrying about what others thought and not taking heed of what they said. I became enclosed in my own little world, oblivious of the real world in which I lived. My low-socioeconomic situation had fully controlled me and led me in the wrong direction.

Moreover, being a poor orphan also limited my opportunities with friends, education, and career abilities. At the age of fifteen, I lost my father, and some of my friends disappeared. I became a poor, stranded orphan with no family to turn too. My friends were too embarrassed to be around me, so they shunned and ignored me every time I tried connecting with them. My education and chances of finding a stable job were also affected negatively. I attended a school with other poor children, whose parents were unable to send them to a higher level institution. Most of the

teachers were awfully inconsiderate and cared only about their salaries at the end of the month. They showed no interest or concern for the goals and dreams we had as students. For example, one day they all went on strike without informing us. We were all deeply hurt when we arrived at school to find that they were not teaching any classes. While all the wealthy students attended school, we had to return home and remain there for a couple days. I was terribly overwhelmed by the teachers' actions, because I knew that the only way out of my situation was to obtain an education. Not obtaining an education instantly depleted my career opportunities. I had no means of attending a university, neither was I qualified to receive a scholarship to take the necessary courses to qualify me as a high school English teacher!

Yet, these struggles were somewhat eradicated when I was baptized and gained a greater understanding of my own self worth. All my burdens and sorrows seemed to vanish. Everything began to go right. Although I did not become wealthy, I received strength, courage, and even some of my basic needs. The companionship of the Holy Spirit also helped me to handle tough situations in a rather simple way. I no longer viewed them as problems, but as guiding trials. The Holy Spirit comforted and directed me during my many times of pain and hardship. I learned that I was a loved daughter of God and had my own spark of divinity as a young woman. How important these truths were to me! I immediately began to love and appreciate myself. I felt I was important and that I was placed here for a special purpose. The families in the Church were a great example to me. The way they interacted with their spouses and others made me want to be like them. The families also treated me with respect and showed their love for me through their words and actions. For example, on several occasions one of them would invite me to have lunch or dinner with them. I always enjoyed the meals and was thankful for the chance to become accepted by others for who I was.

In addition, joining the Church gave me new educational opportunities. I was able to travel hundreds of miles from my country to attend one of the most diverse universities in the world. It is not only the diversity of this institution that is beneficial to me, but the fact that I am surrounded by people with the same beliefs and faith in the Gospel. The faith exercised by these people, gives me courage and strength to bravely overcome the challenges I face each day. Brigham Young University-Hawaii helps me develop myself spiritually, physically, and, of course, academically. I am fortunate to receive life-changing talks every Tuesday, from some of the most religious and educated men and women. These talks frequently address difficult issues that I have, and inspire me to face them. Attending this university makes my career goals completely achievable. I am able to attend important classes that I need to become qualified as a high school English teacher. These classes not only prepare me to teach English, but also to teach main concepts of other subjects

such as geology and biology.

My conversion to the Gospel has entirely changed my lifestyle, and expanded my opportunities with new friendships and relationships. I have set, and keep, high standards as a young woman. I understand the importance of modesty, which includes the way I dress and the way I carry myself around others. I have changed my language from being “dirty” and harmful, to being educative and uplifting. Additionally, I have made new friends with similar interests. We believe in the same Gospel and have the same goals for our future. I can even date guys who have the same religious beliefs I do! The gospel has truly had a great impact on my life, and words are not enough to relate the gratitude I have for it. The Gospel has carried me from a world of pure darkness to a world filled with splendid light.

Though I encountered many struggles growing up in poverty, and after losing my parents, becoming a member of the Church has strengthened my love for myself, as well as increased my educational and social status. I have learned many lessons which have helped me develop my life. I am now able to make wise choices and decisions in my daily activities. I have a greater admiration and appreciation for myself and others. As I carry out my daily routines, I do so with a bright smile on my face and a twinkle in my eyes. I am often comforted with the peaceful companionship of the Holy Ghost. I am looking forward to sharing my testimony with others, so their lives might be blessed; the way mine has been blessed from the amazing examples of my friends in the Church. I am working hard to change the trend in which my family life is going. I strongly believe I can do so, as I know that I will never cease to have help and support from my friends in the Church!

Feeding the Dragon

Siulia K. Purcell



Destruction of the English Language

Vasu Chetty

From thy tongue once didst honey drip,
Yet time has't forsaken thy gentle lip.
Yesterdays have come and gone;
And thy wit has't now itself withdrawn.

Your words once glistened through the air;
But now they quickly cause despair.
Full of sorrow, lacking hope:
Sliding down an endless slope.

Oh my gosh, like, really, wow!
I think I'm, like, a yuppy now.
I'm, like, totally trippin' dude.
Just can't believe I sound so crude.

UR SSINF;
2U TXTIN is GUD VFM.
NVM, GG.
1DER HOW U'LL SPK ENG 2MORO.

[Translation:
You're so stupid, it's not funny;
To you texting is just good value for money.
Never mind, I gotta go.
I wonder how you'll speak English tomorrow.]

New Beginning
Jamie Helms



Friendship Tree

Katherine Beaver

Slender trunk

Branches long

Leaves strong and faithful

Imprinted in this head

Of twigs and thorns

Stands through storms

Roots run deep

Old and fragile friend

Until strong enough

A wind should come

and with it

Snapping boughs and

Autumn showers

Leaving shattered

A mere

skeleton

of what once

was.

Song and Curse

Mari Anne Murdock

Kitya poked at the soap bubbles on her mother's arm as she hung sheets on the rope. The fragile suds stuck tight but finally popped to reveal a long, white line marring her mother's skin. The mother patted Kitya's head with a damp hand and said, "Kitya, smile, and don't trip." Just like she always said.

"Momma," the child asked. "What is that?" She pointed at the line.

"A scar, love."

"What's a scar?"

"A cut, love. Healed by the blood and shaped with time."

"Like on Papa's face?"

The mother nodded. She frowned even though she watched a butterfly flutter in front of her.

"Scars are ugly," Kitya said, remembering the long, red stripe through her father's eyebrow and cheek. "Papa's scar is really ugly."

"He needs it, Kitya love. It reminds him of God."

Kitya stared wide eyed at her mother. "God? What does God have to do with scars?"

The mother glimpsed up from her washtub to stare into the round face of her ruddy-skinned child. The girl's eyes were almost wide, nearly bright with interest, half afraid, half alert. Was it enough?

"It's a strange story, Kitya. Do you really want to hear?" Kitya timidly smirked, bobbing her braids along with her red cheeks. Half was more than enough. "Then you may hear."



Sonia crouched on her soft suede shoes, blocking the weak sun from the porch doorway. Her ears gathered the wisps of autumn-laced wind that spun through dying rose bushes and brick walls. It was still there. The faint song from next door was still souring the leaves in the garden, floating up to wrinkle her nose with its tune. The sickly melody called her, pulling at her hair beneath her kerchief, her wrists from her long-sleeved dress, her heart from her bosom. Ahna Bahbya beckoned from next door...

Grinning, the girl leaped from her house and ran around the pumpkin brick wall bound with black ivy. Slamming her little hands on the spindly gate that hung on rusted hinges, she stared onto the narrow walkway beyond. As expected, the old woman swayed in her own black doorway, staring out into the yellow sky. Her leprous voice strained to sing against her broken teeth. A crumbly shawl wrapped serpentine around her angular head and shoulders, pierced only by a heavily crooked nose and a single eye, the other covered. A grey dress, ashy and limp on her rotund body, churned with the wind, swirling to her strange tune. In her heavy arms perched a silver cat whose head nodded to the music also. His one golden eye watched Sonia as she marched past the gate into the garden,

while the other eye, bottle-green glass, just swirled in the faded sunshine.

*"Winged rats gorge the honeyed bread
Snake-skin tears curled 'round your head
Wee sin-lark doesn't dare tread
On silver wire of spider's web."*

Sonia skipped over the cracked stones at the bottom of the steps, answering the strange call of the mystical chant. The old woman nodded at the girl's arrival, but the cat ignored her. He stared at a snail that crawled besides Sonia's soft suede shoe, his golden eye watching it run. Sonia watched it too but only for a moment as Ahna Bahbya finished her song.

*"Moulding for the honeyed bread
Wormies dancing in your head
Wee sin-lark, watch where you tread
Don't trip on the spider's web."*

"You like the song, Sonia?" the crone crooned in her dusty voice, which slithered away from the threads of the song.

The girl nodded, smiling. "It's a funny one. Very strange. Your cat likes it too."

"He wrote it, dear," Ahna Bahbya droned, her voice growing fine, like mildewed silk, with interest. "He is a clever kitty, Sonia. A clever koshka."

"If he can write a song with words, he is smarter than me," Sonia giggled, smiling up at the old woman's drooped face.

"Magic makes things clever, Sonia. Makes things smarter," Ahna Bahbya whispered, leaning down to the girl's unwavering face. "Magic taught him great things."

"Like what? I learned to write, but not from magic. I learned from my momma. Does your koshka know how to write with a pen and a bottle of blue ink?"

"On sleek, yellow paper too," the old woman added. Sonia giggled at the thought of the cat holding her steel point quill in his little paw. In her mind, he wore bright blue boots and sat at her desk like a boy, a wide, clever smile on his wee kitty face.

"He's a very sly koshka." Ahna Bahbya stroked the cat with her short, fat fingers. "Very sly."

The girl reached up to pet the cat too, but the bottle-green eye twirled fear into thick knots around her hand. She pulled back, hesitant, shy.

"You fear too much, Sonia," Ahna Bahbya chortled in a rumbling belly voice. "He's a very sly koshka, but has a soul white as whipping cream."

Sonia ventured a finger on the smooth hair between the cat's ears. The fur was warm and pleasant, bristled like a violent sneeze, yet tamed, mute. She could feel the rolling rumbles of purrs echo from his furnace inside. He nodded, agreeing with the moment.

"See, Sonia dear? No fear, no fear. He's a sly koshka, but soft.

Tickle his neck and he'll dance for you. Tickle his ears and he'll sing for you. Tickle his heart and he'll write for you."

"What would he write for me, Ahna Bahbya?" the child laughed, again remembering the image of blue boots swinging playfully under the desk.

"Something special. Something nice."

"Something nice? Like what?" Sonia stared up into the grey, glossy eye of the old woman, her own eyes nearly as bright with interest, yet afraid. Solemnity drenched those withered lips and sagging cheeks. Deep thought, deep concern: a depth to reality that no human being could trace without the eyes of a child. The trance melted as all the invisible strands of curiosity faded with a smile on the old woman's face.

"He's already written something for you, Sonia dear. Something very nice indeed." The old woman's voice slipped quietly down to a cautious slur along her tongue. She sucked in a long draw from the auburn air, straining out the demons with her teeth.

"He's already written something for me?"

"Already."

"Just now?"

"Just now, for patting his head even though you think you're frightened."

"Well, what did he write for me?" Sonia skipped all the way up the steps, closer to the hushed mouth of the wise woman. She clasped her little hands before the full, crinkly arms of the crone, on which perched the magic cat. "What is it?"

"A curse, dear Sonia," Ahna Bahbya whispered into the soft pink curve of the girl's ear. "A curse for you, Sonia dear."

"A curse?" Sonia's eyes lit up with bright fear yet her mouth could not help but lift in a spellbound smile. Magic. Real magic! "What curse?"

The hag chuckled in her throat. The cat purred at the noise though it creaked like rusted pail handles. "He says not to tell you, Sonia. He says that if you knew, you'd get yourself into trouble."

"I would not!" the girl exclaimed with surprise bleaching her ruddy cheeks into dull loaves of flesh. "Mama calls me her sweet little bird because I do nothing to get into trouble."

"Bird, Sonia? Sonia-bird." The crone laughed again, amusement watering her single eye even more. The cat just inspected Sonia, the frown of his whiskers deepening. Suddenly, he dropped his vision to follow a black beetle that escaped into the cracks of the stairs.

"Please tell me, Ahna Bahbya!" Sonia pleaded, her small fingers clenched up to beg. Her face screwed up into a tightly winced request. The mystic cackled again, toadlike chirps echoing. The cat continued to frown.

"All right! All right, Sonia-bird," Ahna Bahbya said, wiping a black tear from her wrinkled jaw. "The koshka says all right." The frown still

remained on his face, swaying as his eye trailed a grasshopper in the flower bed.

*"Should maid or man take life from me
Black Devil will rob the life from he,
Drowned and bloated in a vat of salt
Baked in hell fire, the heart shall halt."*

Sonia's brows dropped, forcing her tender mouth to fall wide open. "What a horrible thing! A horrible, horrible thing! Momma would not like to hear that."

"That is why we told you and not your momma, Sonia-bird," Ahna Bahbya sniggered.

"Oh, oh, she would not," Sonia wailed, shaking her round face from side to side. "She would be so sad if she heard my little curse. Oh, she would not like to hear it."

"Did you like to hear it, Sonia-bird?"

Sonia dropped her head, puzzled. A curse. A real curse. Real magic. A gift from the cat. "Did I like to hear it?" Her heart chilled at the thought of her mother's sad face. It was faint, blurry almost, and about to wilt away next to the brightness of the curse. The curse. That magic.

The cat merely jerked his head around to watch a moth settle on the pumpkin-colored bricks. "Well, think on it later, Sonia-bird. Run along home. Your momma is drawing the soup kettle from the fire and bread from the oven. Your papa is bringing up doe-berry jelly from the cellar too, so be sweet and he'll share with you."

The shock faded. The curse disappeared from her memory at the image of glittery, orange jelly. "Yes, Ahna Bahbya!" Sonia sang, her face reddening at the thought of sweets.

"Tomorrow, I will be away, Sonia-bird. Be good while I am away, and don't trip on the spider's web."

Sonia nodded and ran down the steps to the narrow walkway. She trotted away around the brick wall to her home where the sun had found a sliver of space on the doormat. "Shoo, autumn sun. No demons for you in here." With that, she shut the door.



Petcha's burning blue eyes were thorny, blank with determined hate.

"I wish you wouldn't go over to her house," he muttered, his brown hair curling spitefully around his pale ears. "She is a wicked woman."

"She is a lovely woman," Sonia laughed, recalling the smart cat and the magic swaying around that house. "She sings those lovely songs. They're songs her cat wrote!"

The boy hissed under his breath. "Strega."

"She is not!" Sonia's voice tripped in hurt at his word. "She is no strega."

"She is a strega! A witch!" He vaulted forward, his arms flung up toward heaven and his mouth trembling over the word.

Sonia's face froze in sober horror. "No," she whispered. "You are wrong, Petcha!" She shook her head. The bright kerchief covering her hair clung to the breeze, struggling to draw her away.

"Am I?" He narrowed his older eyes and his voice grew stony like crumbling chimney brick. "She sings those curses all day long, cooking lizards and toads over an evil, green fire, while stealing men's souls away with that hidden eye of hers." His hard mouth pulled tight as his eyelids sealed his eyes away in disgust.

"It's not true. Her eye hides because it is weak. It hurts in the light--"

"-That's because the Devil is her father. He poked the old eye out with his black, clawed fingers to give her a wicked eye made of wolf blood and bat spit."

Sonia covered her face with her hands, tears blistering her vision. "No, it's not true! What a horrible, horrible thing to say."

"My papa says it's true!" Petcha wrenched a small hatchet from the woodpile he was sitting on. He held it aloft, as if forcing a covenant into the unwilling sky. "Momma died in the spring! That strega hated spring and hated my pretty momma, so she gave my momma's life to the Devil!"

"No!" Sonia fell to her knees, her soft suede shoes bending beneath her. "You speak horrible lies, Petcha!"

The boy gaped down at her, nearly feeling his heart beat in protest to his blasphemy. He settled a careful hand on her kerchiefed head. "Don't be afraid, Sonia. I will save you from her spell. I will go kill her evil cat while she is away, and her power will vanish." With that, he fled to commit his festered revenge.

Sonia glanced up to see his blue cotton vest blurred in retreat, the shining hatchet blinking as it swung in his fist. The autumn-laced wind whispered the cat's warning in her ears as she screamed after Petcha to stop.

"Should maid or man take life from me"

"No Petcha!" She ran after him, the frantic hands of the dying rose bushes tearing at her skirt and stockings.

"Black Devil will rob life from he,"

"The curse! The curse!"

"Drowned and bloated in a vat of salt"

She hounded him through the spindly gate that shuddered free from its latch in submissive terror. Petcha's arms rose above his blue capped head with the hatchet blade poised above the silver cat who lay sleeping on the porch. The boy flung his hands down suddenly, the wedge whistling in the cold gravity.

"Baked in hell fire, the heart shall halt."

"SCREEEEEEOW!" The silver cat sprung to his feet as Petcha's hatchet nipped the last inch of his tail away. The nib quivered for a moment then cankered to dust which sifted through the boards of the porch.

"Devil!" yelled Petcha, his eyes blazing and his mouth raw. The

silver cat merely frowned up at Petcha, both gold and green orbs fixed on the boy's pale face. The boy jerked back the hatchet once more, preparing to split open the sterling skull before him.

"No!" cried Sonia, her soft suede shoes drumming up the steps until she stood over the magic cat. She flung her arms around his gleaming body and wrenched him to the floral bosom of her little dress.

"Sonia! Let him go! Let me kill the—"

"-Never! Never, never, never!"

"Let him down!" Petcha screamed, flailing the axe over her head.

"No!"

"Sonia!"

Petcha struck.

"Ahhh!"

There was a long silence, so the silver cat walked the length of the narrow walkway, the bloody drips of his footprints trailing behind. The breeze sung, brushing up the brown and dried leaves from under the yellow sky.

"Moulding for the honeyed bread"

Petcha's face flushed scarlet, his hands shuddering free of the hatchet. Mouth dropped open, he felt his confounded tears streaming bitterly onto his tongue.

"Wormies dancing in your head"

He fell to his knees, blue cap falling from his hair. Sweat blinked down his red cheeks, dripping off his smooth chin. "Sonia," he wheezed, his throat ragged in panic. He put his frigid fingers to her wrist where a raven-dark gash ran, smiling in her flesh. "Sonia."

"Wee sin-lark, watch where you tread"

Ebony blood burst from her arm with a deafening screech of a million hellish faces that surged from the wound. Petcha's body flung backward, his hands feebly shielding himself from the maniacal shrieking that ascended into the newly bruised clouds. Louder and louder the demons screamed until suddenly, with a blinding glitter it ceased. Petcha looked up, squinting his frightened blue eyes to see the gold and green glows in the cat's face. Winking, the boy's eyesight cleared to reveal the frowning face of the strega's silver cat. The koska balanced on his hind toes, one foot still smeared with Sonia's clean blood. The bloody hatchet was clasped in his paws, the wedge poised above the blue-clad boy as he lay trembling on the grass. The cat flung his paws down suddenly, the blade whistling as it fell.

"Don't trip on the spider's web."

"Ahhhh!" Kitya covered her eyes.

The mother smiled over her daughter and wrapped reassuring arms about her kerchiefed head.

"Don't cry, love," she called gently.

"The cat, the cat, the boy," Kitya whispered. "Oh, the cat."

"I'm sorry to scare you, love." The mother rocked on her round hips, swaying gently to calm the girl's shaking shoulders. "Hush, dear, hush. It has a good ending."

Kitya looked up to see her mother smiling with her red mouth. She patted her daughter's face.

"What good ending? How could such a story have a good ending?"
"Believe me."



The hatchet was just about to split Petcha's skull when it abruptly stopped. Ahna Bahbya's gnarled hand grasped the steel blunt, steadying it just a hair from the boy's face. The silver cat frowned and scampered off as his golden eye caught a centipede trekking along the walkway's edge.

"Petcha," the old woman growled, saliva threading out of her hovering mouth. "You dared to kill my cat. You were saved from a terrible damnation by dear Sonia-bird. Take her hand and leave the garden."

Petcha's poor body twitched violently in his half-conscious frenzy as he hoisted himself to his hard leather boots. Sonia stood dazed, still on the porch with her arms bundled around empty air where the cat had been, her wrist crying crimson beads onto the worn wood slats. The boy leaped up the steps and snatched her uninjured arm in his still shaky hand. He turned and fled with Ahna Bahbya staring at his blue cotton vest with her one eye. Sonia stumbling behind. The spindly gate creaked shut behind them, and Ahna Bahbya, in her grey dress, ambled with her twisted gait to her porch.

"Sly kitty. Sly koshka," the witch crooned, beckoning her pet away from the bugs in the grass. "That Sonia-bird heard your curse well, didn't she?"

The cat just stared at an ant as it skittered along the walkway.

"No more spider webs, koshka," the strega sighed. "No more for our little Sonia-bird."

She turned her back and tiptoed into the house. The cat sniffed at the snail before following her in.



Sonia just stood in the hall as Petcha slammed her door behind them. He took a quick glance out of the window to the pumpkin brick wall that hid the magic garden from view. All was still. He shook violently for a moment and then breathed in the warm air of the sun-lit room. The sun had ventured into the window, peering over the two children as they lingered by the door. Sonia's pale face still mirrored her sick soul, blank in terror. Reaching down, Petcha painted her tears around her frozen cheek.

"Sonia," he called to her. "Sonia."

She stirred from her shock and stared up into his shining blue eyes. They paused for a moment, sharing what fear drifted away into the backs

of their minds. Magic. They had touched magic. A sticky trickling sound interrupted their thoughts, and both children remembered. They glanced at the worn wood floor to see Sonia's arm still bleeding onto the boards. Petcha stripped off his blue cotton vest and wrapped it around her dripping arm.

"Your eye," she mumbled, awed by a great reverence.

"What?" Petcha asked, tucking the folds of the red-stained blue cloth into themselves. She brushed his forehead with her other hand. Petcha stretched his fingers to where she touched him. There he felt a long, icy stripe which split his eyebrow. Tracing it, he felt it run up to his temple and down to the edge of his nose, the length of the hatchet blade. It was as if the silver cat's stroke had fallen, but ever so long ago so as to heal into a grand scar that glided over his eye like a red silk ribbon.

"Petcha, the curse didn't fall on you."

Panting, he knelt and bowed his head to hide his tears. Sonia joined him on the floor until the sun faded to purple, and Sonia's Papa came home from woodcutting.

"Don't linger by the door, Sonia-bird," her father counseled, touching her kerchiefed head with a strong hand before disappearing into the kitchen. "Demons and devils wait outside."

Sonia and Petcha stared into each other's eyes, each clear, each collected, each peaceful as in heaven.

"Sonia," the boy whispered, his face rigid with solemn sincerity. "You stopped me, didn't you?"

"Yes. You should not have hurt the cat."

"I fought blackness with hate, didn't I? And I hurt you."

Sonia laughed. "Ahna Bahbya's koskha is not blackness. He is magic."

"I fought her magic, and it almost killed me."

Sonia smiled and took her friend's hand. "Now you know. Don't trip on the spider's web."

"Don't trip on the spider's web?"

"Don't fall. Stand up straight. See? Magic makes things smarter."

"Yes." Petcha sighed, humility firm in his cheekbones. "It does."

Sonia grinned, imaging the cat in blue boots sitting at the writing desk.



Kitya smiled. "That was a good ending."

The mother nodded and hugged her daughter before picking up her laundry basket. "It is a good ending. Now, let's go prepare supper so your papa will treat us with some doc-berry jelly."

Hamburger and...

Jerica Manoa

I am still not especially fond of green beans, kidney beans, and carrots, though I have acquired an interest in corn (just not corn in tomato sauce). As a child, I constantly attempted to convince my father that I could not physically eat vegetables. Whenever I tried (was forced) to eat salads, I choked on the tomatoes (though I am not sure of whether tomatoes are vegetables or fruits. For the purpose of my story, tomatoes in my salad will be considered vegetables simply because no one puts fruits in salads, unless of course the salad is a fruit salad). I also do not like olives and mushrooms. Those pesky pests disguise themselves as tiny pieces of meat on my dinner plate, among actual pieces of meat, or hide under noodles of a stir-fry. I am unaware of the deception until the criminals have already broken an entrance into my mouth and have revealed their rubbery consistency and flavor, much to the displeasure of my taste buds. It is too late now; Dad won't eat them once they have been in my mouth. If I had known earlier, I could have spared myself the pain and surreptitiously "not noticed" the offenders until the previous co-occupants of my dinner plate were consumed, leaving the olives or mushrooms to themselves. Coincidentally, I usually realized that I was full whenever all the meat and rice disappeared. I was "too full" to eat the remains of what would have been a wonderful dinner if not for the things I was "too full" to eat. Dad would always eat my leftovers anyway.

The stove of my childhood could brown ground hamburger every night. The sole variants were the additives to the hamburger. I never enjoyed these additives because most often they were vegetables or other disgusting foods that I thought were vegetables, like beans and corn.

Monday: "What is for dinner tonight, Dad?"

"Hamburger and corn."

Wednesday: "What is for dinner tonight, Dad?"

"Hamburger and kidney beans."

Friday: "What is for dinner tonight, Dad?"

"Hamburger and carrots."

This was the kind of excitement I endured as a child. Sometimes my stomach urged me to reply to my father's "Hamburger and..." statement with a, "Can't we just eat plain hamburger?" The answer was always, "No." I did not understand how no one else in my family besides me, who could not even tell time yet, realized how terrible our "Hamburger and..." dinners actually were.

One night, my father surprised me. He placed a bowl of plain hamburger in front of me, just me. Neither my sister nor my brothers received a bowl of such likeness. I was ecstatic, bursting with gratefulness at the absence of vegetables from my meal. I loved that dinner. I never had it again.

While in company one day, I overheard my father say, "Oh, I always end up putting something else with the hamburger. It stretches the meal."

How foolish I felt! How suddenly aware of my selfishness and pettiness! Neither of my parents were raised in anything even resembling the lap of luxury, yet there were always many mouths to feed in their families and not always enough money to spend.

"That is how I always ate it," Dad continued.

Even as a married couple struggling through college, my parents survived on two-dollar paychecks. The things they must have had to sacrifice! No fancy date dinners for them.

"And I just started to like it," Dad concluded.

My only sacrifice as a child was cartoon time for showering, and that sacrifice was dreadful enough for me. It had never occurred to me that my parents had to pay for my food, not to mention that they may not have had much money to pay for my food.

Now that I understood the reason for my dad's choice in meals, my perspective on "Hamburger and..." dinners changed.

Monday: "Do you want hamburger and carrots for dinner, Jerica?"

"Okay."

Wednesday: "Would you be okay with hamburger and kidney beans tonight?"

"Yes."

Friday: "What do you want for dinner tonight, Jerica?"

"Hamburger and corn."

Sometimes even now, despite my great appreciation and love for my parents, who made sure that food was never scarce on our dinner table, I dread "Hamburger and..." nights. However, whenever those nights arrive I try to stay positive (or at least try to appear happy), and eat the mushrooms, or olives, or zucchini, or eggplant. I even liked some of the combinations my father created, such as hamburger and squash.

Many times, I cannot bring myself to finish all of the vegetables on my plate even with my conscience reminding me of my ungratefulness at not doing so. Dad will eat my leftovers anyway. He cannot stand to waste, "Not with all those starving people in the world, and at the beach down the road," he reminds me.

Those cartoons I had to sacrifice watching as a child in order to have time to shower taught me that vegetables were "yucky." That is what I learned, that is what I thought. My father, who probably lived his childhood in a time before the invention of cartoons, learned something else, something better. Maybe if he were a cartoon character and sang a song about appreciation while dancing in some kind of overly colorful costume with cheerful animals harmonizing with his voice in the background, I would have learned the same lesson he learned as a child. For now, though, I know that my dad will still eat my leftovers.

Just Two Lounging Blalahs
Jolene Kanahele



MET MYSELF

Janelle Adams

I met myself,
In trembling Grasp
Shriveling hands
Cheeks drawn in
Nose drawn out
Chin dangling
Eyes sunk in
Freckles faded
Age spots revealed
Color stripped even
To the ends of hair
Nodding ever Bobbing
Head.

Beach Cruiser
Jenny Colman



Reflecting Upon Temple Grounds

Mike Buck

The echoes of playful children
Force me to reflect upon my youthful days
In which there seemed to be no burden
Except whether to work or play.

From that time on Education loomed over life
But yet all seemed to stay the same
For Stark reality defined a singular strife:
When play trumped work-I must be blamed.

Yet all of life's questions
and all that I know
Seems so small when one individual mentions
"Where would a young son like you go?"

The world beckons for work upon my mind
Which only beholds a narrow path
Yet with my sight I see the blind
Crawling, Crawling, Dying...along the treaded path

Then the thumps of my small young heart grows each second
Pleading for the affectionate satisfaction of works;
For work discovered by personal joy cannot descend
oneself into depression knowing others ascend from your deeds as a
flying firework

Yet the future is so uncertain
And as I listen to the children play
I find myself as I was
Reflecting upon the same old question day after day
What should I do?
Work or Play?

Once upon a time, in a faraway land, there was a town. Now in this town, there was no flying. There were no birds, kites, or paper airplanes. Everyone kept their feet firmly on the ground. In this town in the faraway land, there lived a little boy. The little boy did not have a name, for the people were practical people that believed naming things, such as little boys, caused one to grow too attached and thus made the ultimate trip into the darkness despairing and sad.

The little boy with no name loved to climb and explore, as most little boys do. One day, he found a small cliff that over-looked the ocean and the small town he lived in. He stayed upon this cliff until the sun set, and the moon and her children rose and filled the sky. Quite suddenly, the little boy was struck with a thought: how did the moon and the stars stay up in the sky? He wondered what it was that kept them from falling. He fell. Every time he had ever tripped in his life, he had fallen. He never just floated, as the moon and her kin did now. The boy went home, knowing not to bother discussing his curiosities with his parents because he already knew what they would say: "Don't worry about it. How was school?" School was the most important thing in the town. Although their school was not like ours. The children went there and tried different things, different skills, every day. Some tried woodworking. Others handled metal. Once they had found a particular skill that they possessed some talent in, they were released from school, and they became workers at their talent-chosen job. They worked these jobs until they could work no more. The town then allowed them three years to put their affairs in order and they were sent on a trip down the ever-deepening well, letting the darkness take them away.

The boy awoke the next morning, and after school, where he'd tried metallurgy and nearly burned his hand off, he went and sat next to the town well. Most of the other children avoided the well, fearing their ultimate trip down it would come sooner rather than later if they ventured too close, but the boy was not afraid. He sat and he stared down into the darkness. The town fool, for every proper town has a town fool, came and stood next to the little boy. There were no words nor glances exchanged. The little boy simply got up and left.

The next day the little boy climbed the cliff again, awaiting the moon and her children. He was soon joined by the fool who, this time, glanced down at the boy.

"What is your question?" the fool asked, for he had noticed the question the boy carried in his eyes.

"How do the moon and the stars stay in the sky?"

"They fly," The fool answered simply.

The boy pondered the answer before turning back to the fool and

asking, "What is fly?" The fool started down at the little boy and lifted his own arms and with a few fluid flapping motions, the fool began to rise off the ground and into the air. Astonished, the little boy begged, "teach me, teach me."

The fool floated gently to the earth, looked solemnly at the boy.

"It will be a rigorous training and it will take a long time." The boy nodded, wide-eyed.

And so the flying lessons began and continued on and on. Eventually the boy's parents disowned him. It was quite a disappointment for practical people to allow a little boy to 'pal around' with the town fool all day. Thus they cut their losses. It was no loss for the little boy though. The fool took him as his own. Days passed into months which passes into years. One day as the fool sat by the well, he noticed that his once chocolately hair had been glittered with gray, and he found himself looking at the boy and saw that he had become a man.

"Boy, I am too old to go up the cliff today. You must go alone."

"But, you went yesterday."

"But I cannot go today. All birds must leave their nests." The man carried the question in his eyes just as he had when he was a boy. "Don't tell me you've forgotten what a bird is!" the fool said.

"No, I just don't know what a nest is," The man said, with a smile on his lips and tears in his eyes.

The fool smiled to himself, then looked up at the man, "You are ready."

The man climbed up to the cliff as he had many times before, yet the journey seemed so much longer and more difficult than it had the last time. At long last, he reached the top. He closed his eyes, extended his arms, and began flapping rhythmically, slowly but strongly. He lifted into the air just as the fool had done so many years ago. The man jumped off the cliff and soared over the sea, across and around his town in the faraway land. He circled around once more and hovered by the well. The fool was not there. The man was not surprised. He knew the fool had been taken by the darkness, like all the rest. Sadness and loss overwhelmed him, his heart dropped and he felt his feet touch the ground at the same moment his heart did. The man heard a gasp from behind him. He turned and found a little boy watching him.

"What were you doing?" The boy asked, his eyes wide with excitement and fear. The man smiled:

Flying.

Mom and Dad are Dirty

Jordan Flake

Growing up in a Mormon home, I was no stranger to songs like “I’m Trying to Be like Jesus” and phrases such as “Choose the Right” or “What Would Jesus Do?” This constant flood of goodness set, in my mind, a level of purity, or at least an expectation of one, for me and my family. I usually tried to be good (at least when my parents were around) and would always be super-scared and cautious when my friends started talking dirty or said bad words. I was particularly sensitive about the word “sex” because I knew it was the worst word man had ever created. I had somewhat of an idea of what it consisted of. I knew only bad guys and dirty girls with thick dark-red lipstick did “it.” I was also sure they had to be naked and Satan and his angels were probably there too.

I had a little sister who was just three years younger than I was, and at five years old, she was the biggest tattler tale that walked the earth. “Mom, Jordan won’t let me play with him!” Every two minutes it seemed like it was “Jordan did this, Jordan said that.” If I even set foot on her “dance stage” she stormed into the house in a rage and exploded at the nearest adult that cared (or acted like it) and said, “Jordan is bugging me.” I was reprimanded. I could not take it. I combated her constant tattling by giving it back to her whenever she fouled up. Usually, my mom tired of our endless tattling and told us to knock it off. I waited until I caught her doing something really bad to cash in on this tattling war.

One day, an older neighbor girl was over choreographing dances with my sister on the deck of our back-yard-pool. They were singing along to a song and that’s when I heard it: “sexy.” They sang it on the radio and I heard my sister repeat it. I had just hit the jackpot. I was sure she would be dead meat now. I imagined the punishments she would receive as I sprinted. I burst into the house, ran past my mom and found my dad (he was a lot more strict) and blurted out, “Dad, Natalie just said the worst word ever.” He, of course, was a little concerned and probably more curious to see what I considered the “worst word ever.” He asked, “Well, what did she say?” I was too afraid to say it, fearing my plan would backfire if my dad heard me say it, I spelt it. “She said S-E-X.” I knew she was in deep trouble, but that is when my world came crashing down.

My dad chuckled a bit and I guess he decided to blow my innocent little mind. He took me into his room (which I assumed was so he could investigate my sister’s horrible sin further) and asked, “Do you know what sex is?” I admitted I knew it was bad but did not let him know of my extensive knowledge on the subject, especially the part about being naked. That just would have led to further questioning about my source of that dirty information. Besides, I was there to get my sister what she deserved, not to get a lecture.

He then explained what it was and why people did it. He did not go

into any great detail in explaining the process. He did not have to. My eight-year-old heart was already going into cardiac arrest. I did not believe him and felt myself blushing. I almost lost it and I think I did start crying, when I found out that he and my mother did "it" too. I felt like throwing up at the image of my father and mother naked together in the bed I was sitting on. I felt the floor being ripped out from underneath me. I was so confused, sickened and hurt that my parents would do such a horrific thing and that my dad would be so casual about telling me.

This was not what I was planning. I was expecting my sister to get what she deserved, not for me to be faced with this horrible realization. I was upset that all my sister got was a quick little "Natalie, don't say sex." I was counting on a little more capital punishment. She did not even have to face the truth or carry around a portion of the horrible burden that I did. I guess my dad decided she was too young to be trusted with such disgusted and incriminating knowledge.

From then on, I had a hard time looking at grown-ups the same way. I found myself suspicious of other married people in my life, wondering if they had sex too. Mental images frequently haunted me as I saw married people, especially when grandparents visited. Ugh! It was a heavy weight at my young age but I had no problem lightening the burden by telling all my friends at school my new discovery about how their parents were dirty too.

Untitled
Coreen Williams



Passionately Vague

Stephen Hancock

She does something to me,
Strokes a part of me that feels vaguely.

Parting the sea of what is indefinable in my soul.

Reaching in to retrieve what I do not recognize.

And I am in need of something in her.

She is that thing that is no longer foreign.

We live a life together that makes me

Something other than what I was.

And in thinking what I may be

She is outside my inside,

but inside the limits of my margins.

I reach into her and find a gift.

I lay it out before me

And wonder what it is.

Untitled
Leilani Coffey



Untitled

Anna Rosa Hubert

When I see you I'll smile, we are friends after all.
but before I can talk, my back's against the wall
your words sew my lips, tightly pressed and joined
the thread tears as it pulls my skin across the teeth
silent now, I insist you speak and encourage the admittance of the past to
break the pain.
words continue, tumbling forth, blocking my body and blocking my mind,
throwing me roughly back.
i'm shoved aloof but try to smile through the tailor's work,
the end is near: you hold me close, so grateful for such a friendship as
mine:
'our feelings are respected and our actions not rejected'
and then you go, pulling with you the strings that pierced my tongue
i fall to the ground, bled to the bone, my spirit spent,
thank you for the friendship that keeps me from feeling too strong

Better Than Both

Nate Stout

If Kyle was telling this story, it would be boring. He would say that it was no big deal, that after two days he was fine. That he'd moved on. He'd say he'd had a decent day that turned crappy, but it didn't ruin his week. That everything was all okay by the weekend. If Kyle was telling this story, he would lie. Because it wasn't okay. It sucked. It did ruin his week. It ruined his week, his month, year, and so on. He didn't get over it in two days. He's still not over it. Not even after three years.

So, history of the KJ and me. Three years ago, we were both twenty years old. We were just starting our sixth semester of college at a university that I do not have permission to discuss. It was a good one though. Starts with an "H" and ends with an "arvard."

The story starts with me, Kyle, and Kyle's lady of, like, forever. Girl by the name of Alexa. She was in town visiting for a few days, which she'd do once a semester. This particular trip should've been like any other. He goes and picks her up, they chill for a week, skipping class of course, and then say a tearful goodbye for two months until vacation. He got all ready for her, did his laundry, vacuumed the room, put away the XBox (kill me now!), and shaved his playoff beard. She hates facial hair. I guess it's true when they say that no one's perfect. He left at 11 am to pick her up, and they got back around one. They always got Frostys on the way back. Romantic, right? We went bowling after dinner, we meaning we three and my SOW (Squeeze of the Week). I can't recall her name or her face, only that she was my first redhead and a total babe, obviously. Being a babe is kind of an unspoken rule for dating me. After bowling, they went to the park to catch up on whatever details they couldn't fit into their technology-based communications regimen, and I took SOW back to the room and ravished her. ¡Tigré!

It was a great ten days with them. Alexa was cool as she always was. But, something was... off. At putt-putt golf, I cracked the annual marriage-since-they-were-ten joke along with the "How much do you really believe in Baha'i really?" They both laughed like always. Then we went to Shea Stadium for a game. He bought the peanuts and sodas like usual, and I picked up the ice creams in a helmet and accompanied it with a "Only four days left until you say goodbye for another two months." She was so oblivious to what Kyle had planned, I almost couldn't handle the mounting excitement. It felt like me and my roomie had a secret from the world, a surprise that was sure to make the trip infinity-times better than it already was. Cut to the seventh inning stretch. Home team is down one; everyone cheer 'em on! Louder! Okay, great! Now shut the hell up and look at the scoreboard.

And there it was. The question in waving, pixelated font that would make or break the relationship. The question that was sure to elevate the visits to new heights, like a new baby on Splash Mountain (which is

against park rules due to height restrictions, but it's just a metaphor). Kyle was looking classy that day. A Mets striped polo and some killer slacks that he spent a good seventeen hours ironing, the OCD little puke. There he was, kneeling down when she turned to the big screen and then opening the ring box as she turned back. The camera zoomed in on them. She freaked. I was laughing -not on camera of course- and leading the crowd in chanting "Say Yes! Say Yes!" and a marriage-inspired, full stadium wave. Even the wheelchair patrons got out of their seats. It was *that* good. Oh man, the love in that stadium was so thick it was like the oozy fat in a ballpark frank. Just palpable. It was not until we got through the second verse of Alabama's *Will You Marry Me?* that I realized the ring was not yet on her hand. She was actually trying to get past the drunk guy on our right but couldn't due to the fact he was completely tanked and super excited to be on the big screen. Kyle was still kneeling but in his hand was his forehead instead of the ring, which was now nestled in the pile of peanut shells. Like I said, if Kyle told this story he would've said he got right back on his feet and cheered on John Maine. I have 53,427 Mets fans that would disagree. The shells of a delicious snack and the shell of an unparalleled romance would be swept up that night by an underpaid janitor with three gold teeth and colorful rap sheet. Had I been able to tune out the gasps from the thousands in attendance, I'd like to think I may have heard something along the lines of a sobbing "I'm sorry" from Alexa but how can you be sure with thousands of drunk, screaming New Yorkers? I knelt down next to my friend, but really, what could I say? I had nothing. I gave him a few pats on the back and told him to get the hell on his feet because the shutout was at stake, but I don't think a no-hitter in the World Series could have lifted his spirits, and this was just a regular season game. The next pitch blew the shutout anyway. The ball sailed into shallow left, and it was right about the time the outfielder caught it off the bounce that I realized we only had brought one car...

I slid by Kyle's now motionless body, stuck in an almost Thinking Man-esque pose, and booked up the stairs, narrowly avoiding the lemonade vendor. I bought one, just to be polite. I mean, I did almost knock him down. I leaned against the wall and drained the over-priced beverage as I tried to figure out a carpool arrangement that would be the least awkward. The lemonade was gone within a minute and when no solution came immediately to mind, I made my way out to Section D to console my best friend's ex-would-be fiancé.

~~~~~  
All right, maybe just a little further back. Kyle and I had met on our college visit, and found out we were roommates when we arrived for freshman orientation. I wasn't sure about the rooming situation the first week or two. I mean, when we met, he seemed like a pretty tight guy, but being a tight guy and being an awesome roommate are two different judgement calls for a guy to make. Those first weeks, all he did was pour

his feelings into my ears at warp speed and ask me what I thought. It was ironic too because he was the Psych major. I had no idea what to do for four years. He seemed like such a pussy, so open and annoying, while I barely spoke to anyone much at all. After that first week though, this roommate/psychologist relationship really blossomed into quite a bond. I'd put it on pace with rubber cement. It's no super glue but the best bonding agent you'll ever need for school.

I learned all about him that first semester. His aspirations to become the next big celebrity shrink and how he wanted to divorce his parents like one of the Coreys. The one from Stand By Me and The Goonies. I suggested his first client as a psychiatrist...wait, psychologist? Whichever one, I told him his first client should be Lindsay Lohan, so he could fix her up to be my woman for a few weeks until I got famous via the paparazzi stalking us from our public makeout spot to her house. That brought in his religious beliefs, which we discussed in detail. He was of the Baha'i faith or something, like the guy that plays Dwight Schrute, and so he said he couldn't "fix" Lindsay for me if I was gonna hit it and quit it because he wouldn't support pre-marital sex. Baha'i's are like Mormons or something, they only f...excuse me, *consummate*, after marriage. That's nucking futs. I could never do that. I asked him if he had ever had a girlfriend. This was the golden question. He brought out this shoe box of pictures that he then began to hang on the wall as he recounted all the many tales of adventure they had been on together.

They met when he was in second grade. He claims love at first sight. I'm not a firm believer in that concept but that's what he said, and who am I to say he didn't love her when he saw her? I wasn't there. They were inseparable at their schools. The talk of the town. Their parents thought they were "cuter than a bug's ear." That's how it went for all of primary school and middle school, as Kyle tells it. They became an official couple late in their eighth grade year, as everyone expected, and continued their romance through high school. They made plans for prom their freshman year and fulfilled them junior and once again senior year. The way he told it, they sounded like total lame-asses. They would be the couple I would've made fun of unceasingly throughout high school. His eyes told me as he recounted their story that he loved her. And if I hadn't noticed it in his eyes, I would've known from the bi-weekly phone calls, daily facebook flirtation, and millions of text messages they sent everyday. He couldn't live without her, and if her end was even half as sappy as his, she couldn't live without him.

Honestly, I am surprised that they went to different schools. She got a scholarship to an ivy-league, and he said he never wanted to limit her potential. He didn't want to pull a Cory Matthews and keep his Topanga from Yale. I love that show so his analogy made sense to me.

All right, so that was our freshman year in summary. At Christmas break, he invited me to his house for the holidays, and, of course, I went. She met us at the airport and everything he had told me about her was

true. When I first saw her, I was about to crack to Kyle that I was "so gonna bang that Swedish model" when she took off running towards us and jumped into his arms. I'm glad I held that back. Can you say awkward? She was *fine*. If I had to cast a play that had Aphrodite in it or some character describes as out-of-this-world attractive, she would be the logical choice. You think Jessica Alba is hot? Seriously, this girl is better. BABE. And she was the sweetest, coolest, chilliest chick I ever met. I don't know how Kyle scored her. He must've swooped in during her awkward stage because, even empirically speaking, he's nothing to shout about. That vacation was awesome. I was the permanent third wheel, and I still had fun.

After that, me visiting during break became a tradition. I hung out with them a lot throughout the summer breaks as well, went to his house for the holidays, and both of them took turns visiting each other at school. I preferred her visiting because as many girls as I "dated" in college and as much as I liked a week with no roommate when I could queensize my bed with his mattress, I missed him. No homo. Just a week without my best friend was like eating ice cream after getting teeth pulled. It's still ice cream, but you're so numb it may as well be dog crap. Plus, I liked seeing her too. For real, they were so perfect for each other, and they were really cute together. And you know if I say that, it must be true because I am probably the shallowest kid ever. I mean, if I had to have an actual, multi-week relationship, it'd be like theirs. Her last visit three years ago, I could tell they were gonna be together forever. Like that guy in The Sandlot when they're in the treehouse. For-ev-er.

But alas, that's when we cut to the tragedy that was the baseball game. The fat kid in The Sandlot was wrong because for-ev-er ended right then at the seven and a third inning of the game. Um, so yeah, she says no and runs. I try to help out my broha to no avail then realize I should also try to talk some sense into the woman of his dreams as we would have to share the epitome of awkward car rides back home.

Actually, that's pretty much the remainder of the day in two sentences. The rest is just the standard stuff. You know the drill. Just doing my part to rekindle, trying to be The Man, the hero, the guy that gets to be recognized at the wedding as The-"Without him we'd still be watching baseball"-Guy aka Best Man. And yes, we had the just the most *comfortable* of all vehicular transportation trips back to the suburbs. Lovely. Not awkward at all. Fabulous. No, yeah, it was awful. Even The Wiggles couldn't ease the aura of gaucherie-ity in the car. I was able to talk to each of them alone before she left to figure out what happened. I won't name names but *one* of them just cried on my shoulder for an hour and a half. Then *she* explained that the distance between them coupled with her high school doubts and increasing, um, *urges* (she told me not to use the word horny-ness), she wanted to slow down the relationship and only let it get serious when they were together. I then realized the

importance of communication a relationship, and took note so I could utilize it in ridding myself of annoying one-nighters that don't want to leave. Golden.



So that was three years, seventeen days ago. Kyle's in-dorm therapy sessions started about a week later and continued to graduation. We both naturally assumed that that specific instant in his life was the low point that he could never reach again. The bottom apex of sheista. I mean, getting rejected in front of 50,000 screaming, drinking, judging fans cannot really be beat. That's just humiliating. Oh man, even *I* was embarrassed, and I was a good ten feet from them. Kyle bounced back after four months or so. I told him he only got to mourn a day for every six months they'd been together. I know it's a week for every three months. So I lied to him. Sue me. I did set apart ten minutes a day for him to cry. Set the timer, and when it buzzed, I slapped him until he stopped crying. That only lasted a week. Yeah right was I going to let him cry for ten minutes straight. What a pansy. I took him out after about five months, found him some honeys, you know, campus sluts looking for some exercise for their pillowy lips. Our apartment was labeled "The Fun Zone" for that semester. Best semester of my life. We always brought them back for an after-ice-cream snack and fortunately for me, he was still Baha'i. Rookie. LOVED it.

Fast forward to seventeen days ago. There we were, three years after D-Day, and we were both doing wonderfully. We still lived together. After college we rented an apartment, "The Fun Zone: Part 2," i.e. "Eden," and we both had some solid post-college jobs. He was still single. Like I said, he still wasn't over it. He was chill though. No more waking me up at one in the morning to his girly sobs. No pictures of her in our apartment. I mean, he dated around but no one more than a month steady. I was never sure if he was still harboring hope for her or if the girls were pissed that he was Baha'i and couldn't satisfy them sexually. We both still talked to Her (no saying her name, it was a new rule), she hung out with us when she was in town. We Facebooked. She was still a decent friend to both of us. Then, about eleven months ago, she moved into town. We had lunch once a week for a while, but you know how they say "you take advantage of what you've got when you've got it"? That whole parental credo? After a month or two, we didn't really miss her any more, so we never really hung out. The weekly coffee became occasional coffee breaks and then nothing really. A phone call here or there. Not anyone's fault really. We were all just *really* into our careers right then.

So, seventeen days ago, we went to a game. I had Skank #1 on my arm, from now on called #1 because I don't remember her name, just that she was a *freak*. A beautiful, foxy tiger. Kyle had Skank #2, whom I later had too (awww yeah). I'll just say, this part isn't as clear as I would like, but I will do my best to recount what little I can. Let's just say, by the bottom of the second, America's Favorite Pastime was outta my mind to

make way for a new pastime that me and #1 had discovered. It kinda felt like the cheers were applause from an audience of some show that me and #1 were both now starring in. By the seventh inning stretch, #1 was about three plastic cups above the legal driving limit and still having fun while I had to surface for some oxygen and a drink of something other than her mouth. That's when the announcement came to look at the board. Déjà vu, except this time I wasn't expecting it. I glanced to Kyle, just to make sure he hadn't bonded with #2 so much in six innings that he would be so bold to reuse his already unoriginal idea and pop the question to some floozy I met on the cardio machine at Bally's. He hadn't. He looked at me with just as much nonchalance as he could muster being as drunk as he was. He had the sloppiest "Hey, whaddya make of this tool?" look on his face. We both looked back to the screen to see who the cliché lame-ass was that would utilize one of the most overused techniques in sports history. Right when my eyes locked onto the screen, it changed from the *Will you marry me?* text to the loving couple. The camera focused on the guy, who was kneeling down (surprise, surprise!). He was nothing spectacular. The type of guy you would expect to pull a sports-related marriage proposal; glasses, worn hat, smiling. Then the camera panned to the chick. She was beautiful and familiar. She was *Her!* She-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named. *Alexa*. I watched *Her* pull her hands from her mouth and scream the words "Yes! YES, YES, YES!" Her happiness and smiling demeanor was, by definition, an exact recreation of the ideal reaction Kyle had expected when he had asked the same question. Then I remembered I had brought my best friend and her broken-hearted ex to the game. I turned to see that he was still staring at the Jumbotron, oblivious to #2 still making a valiant effort to sponge-bathe his entire esophagus with her tongue. He told me in his letter he literally died inside right then. He felt his heart stop for a good three seconds. His brain couldn't process anything and his stomach, having been quite active announcing its craving for some nourishment, went completely still and silent.

If Kyle was telling this story he would say the Mets won 4-0, a 2-hit shutout. He would say it was no biggie. He's just glad that his New York Metropolitanans had made the post-season after a disappointing collapse the season prior. If Kyle was telling this story, he would lie. The Mets lost 2-1 on a controversial home run in the 8th. But Kyle obviously can't tell this story. I don't want to say because of *Her* per se, but it was because of Her effect on him. If Kyle was telling this story, he might let us know what hurts more, getting a no or seeing a yes. I don't know which is worse, but either, I believe, is better than both. If Kyle was telling this story, well... at least he would still be here to tell it.

## Geeks Don't Get Chicks

*Felipe Martins*

The last time I wrote a personal essay I wrote about how awesome my writing was and often compared myself to the greats, like Dave Barry and *Dilbert* creator Scott Adams. This time around I figured I'd write about what I'm not good at. Of course I can't write about everything I suck at (which would be just about everything), mostly because I'd have an encyclopedia to write, so instead I'm going to focus on just one small portion of life I suck at: romance.

My first experience with romance was in kindergarten. I took a fancy to Karen, the girl who sat next to me. She, like everyone else in Provo, Utah, was white but I didn't see anything wrong with that. She seemed impervious to my feelings for her; nothing I did struck a chord. One day I thought I would just go for it, so I leaned over and tried to kiss her but ended up falling on my face, so to speak. Apparently she didn't get the memo that when someone tries to kiss you, you need to lean in and kiss them back, not lean back in an attempt to make the person look like an idiot. (Which I was more than capable of doing myself and didn't need any help.) I blame Disney for my failure. In all their movies and shows, they make kissing look so easy. Two people look at each other and then BAM; lips are locked in about as much time as it takes to shake someone's hand. So my record stood at 0/1. Little did I know that the number 0 and myself would be going steady for quite some time.

Opportunity knocked at my door merely a year later. A new family moved into one of the apartments in our complex. I don't remember how we met but it must've been by the hand of God, for their situation was nearly identical to my family's. They had recently moved from Brazil to Utah, I ended up befriending the two kids, Natasha and Tyler Santos; they had few recollections of Brazil and were just as American as myself. We became best friends. Out of all our wacky adventures, the most bizarre had to be when Natasha felt the need to inform me about reproduction, the birds and the bees, during a game of Red Rover. (There's symbolism in here somewhere. It's times like this that make me wish I had paid more attention in English class.) Of course, my puny first grade brain was incapable of understanding a word she said, and her trying to explain it in animal terms only confused me more. I said something along the lines of "Birds and bees don't go together. Sometimes birds are really loud, especially in the morning. I guess a bee might get angry and sting them to try and show 'em who's boss. But bees die after stinging though I guess there's some solace in killing yourself in order to cause someone else discomfort. How do people fit into this?" She wasn't put off by my thick-headedness and ended up dropping the subject all together. I grew quite close to their family and was often invited on family outings. Sadly, their family ended up moving to North Carolina by the time I finished 2nd

grade. Not like that mattered, since our family ended up moving mere months later to the other side of Provo. (Score: 0/2).

It was on this side of Provo that I saw something I had never seen before: a dark skinned person not related to me. Sure, I saw dark people on TV, I also saw aliens on TV. Didn't make them any more real. (Which is good because aliens tend to destroy the world. Although dark people did tend to shoot other humans on TV, I consider that a notch below the complete and utter annihilation of the human race). But this dark person was real and a pretty/smart female classmate to boot. And, just to add more hot fudge to the sundae of life, she lived on the street right next to mine, making the walks home from school more enjoyable. (At least for me it was.) For the most part, I don't remember exactly what we talked about, most likely mundane matters. The one conversation I can remember involves when we both found out that we'd be in the same class in 4th grade. I once heard that love was like a box of chocolate. I couldn't agree more. Whenever I get a box of chocolate, someone always steals all the chocolate. (At least they're kind enough to leave the box). And, like my chocolate, someone had to come along and take this all away from me. My parents thought that now would be an excellent time to move and seek employment elsewhere. I was devastated, so much so that it took me a whole 24 hours to get over it and I never once looked back to that moment until now (Thanks a lot. Score:0/3).

My next encounter with love came in the 5th grade and this time around I did nothing but sit around and be completely lovable and irresistible. (I have a habit of doing that. Sitting around, I mean. Being lovable and irresistible was by pure chance and I haven't been able to replicate it for a while). Normally, I'd welcome a chance to finally be admired (for once), but Heidi was like Ugly Betty, only minus the fame, money and any admirable qualities. (You'd think someone ugly would offset that by being smart, but not her). As if that wasn't bad enough, she followed me everywhere: from the cafeteria, to the bus, to the playground. The only solace came from hiding in the bathroom, but even then she'd just wait right outside the door. (And whoever designed the school needs to be shot. The ventilation ducts were 12 feet high. I need a ladder to get to that \$#@!) She even laughed at all my jokes (Ok, this I can understand). Heidi was the reason restraining orders were invented. Thankfully, she didn't come back for 6th grade. (I guess whomever I paid to shoot the architect shot her instead. Oh well. Mission Accomplished). Sixth grade had to have been the best year of my life. Everything was so perfect I have no jokes to make about it. (Sorry) My parents, sensing how much fun I was having in school, decided that this was unacceptable and quickly made plans to move to Hawaii. (I consider being harassed a bad thing so the score stands at 0/4).

"But Fel," I can hear you asking me, "Hawaii is the one place where

anyone, even an bumbling idiot like yourself, can find someone to love them.” That statement is true; I just wish it were more than one person. You see, that ‘someone’ did come along during the 9th grade. To this day, I’m not really sure what Raye saw in me. She was beautiful and I was...well, the same as I am now. (I should probably see a doctor about not aging). She was the pitcher for the softball team, the closest I came to sports was playing football on my Playstation. You can imagine how surprised I was when she asked me out.

Me (thinking): I can’t believe a cute girl’s finally asked me out. Better accept now before it’s too late.

Angel Fel: Wait, you can’t.

Me: Who’re you?

Angel Fel: I’m the good inside you.

Me: And here I thought you didn’t exist. So why can’t I go out with Raye?

Angel Fel: You’re not 16 yet.

Me: So you’re saying I shouldn’t go out with a totally smoking babe just because I’m not old enough?

Angel Fel: Yes.

Me: I’m 15 and 6 months. Counting the time I spent in a womb puts me at 16, so there.

Devil Fel: Yeah, you tell that loser. Why should he wait until he’s 16 anyway?

Angel Fel: Because by then he will be mature enough to handle a relationship.

Devil Fel: Mature? Look at where he is now compared to four years ago. I don’t see a whole lot of maturing going on here.

Me: He’s got a point.

Angel Fel: Well, you should wait because that’s the rule. And you want to follow the rules, don’t you?

Me: No.

Angel Fel:...Well...good things come to those who wait.

Me: So you’re saying Raye will get better with age? She’s not wine, you know.

Angel Fel: I know that. I meant that by waiting....you’d get someone better. Yeah, like Angelina Jolie.

Me: \*\*\*\* yeah, I always wanted Angelina Jolie.

Devil Fel: Don’t listen to him!!!

Me: Can you top Angelina Jolie? Didn’t think so.

In hindsight, I was pretty stupid back then. And I don’t think a whole lot has changed since. Sadly, someone else asked Raye out before I was able to turn 16. (But I’m sure she got better with age.) By the time I

actually did turn 16, I had no idea what I was doing in terms of romance.  
(Score 0/5)

Me: I have no idea what I'm doing.

Friend Who Is Female: Fel, you're too superficial. Girls don't like guys who are good looking. They like guys with brains and good personality.

Me: You sure? That doesn't seem to follow human instinct.

Friend Who Is Female: Don't you think I'd know more about what women want than you?

Me (thinking): I could really use my good and bad versions right about now. Where are those guys?

Ninja: I am a ninja who is also an expert in relationships.

Me (thinking): You're not a relationship expert, get the \*\*\*\* out of here!

Me: You make a good point. I will pay more attention to academics and my personality while completely disregarding anything having to do with appearance.

Thanks to her, I'm smarter and funnier than what I used to be. By now you're thinking, "Fel, you're such a bumbling idiot. I bet you haven't gone on a single date in your entire miserable existence!" and that's where you'd be wrong cause I indeed have gone on one at the end of my junior year in high school. (In your face, reader!) In case you're wondering how in the world it happened, this is how.

Friend: Hey Fel. We're having this group date this weekend, turns out David couldn't make it, and we're currently nearing the end of our list of possible replacements to go out with Elyse.

Me: Don't tell me I'm at the bottom of the list.

Person Who I Thought Was My Friend: No. You're one step above a cadaver and two steps above an imaginary friend. (Score 1/6 I sure showed those dead and imaginary people whose boss). Sadly, my senior year in high school was a lot more depressing than the others. I guess with the prospects of going to college far away, no one wanted to get into a relationship. (At least, this is what I was told. I could've been lied to). Things got so bad around prom time that me and my fellow losers came up with this gem of an idea.

Me: The only option left for us losers is to take blowup dolls to prom.

Cameron: Do we really want to spend \$90 on that? Blowup dolls are just air and plastic.

Me: Yeah, well, you're Jewish, so what's the difference?

Needless to say, we ended up not going. To this day, I still blame Cameron for his blatant racism against inanimate objects. And that's how my high school year came to an end. (Score: 1/7)

Of course it's not like college has changed my chances at romances. I thought college girls were easier to get with. Did MTV lie? Maybe I'm just asking out the wrong type of girls. Most inquiries about dates usually end up like this.

Me: Hey, do you want to go out this weekend?

Female Classmate: Sorry, I have to catch up on homework

Me: Consider that today is Tuesday, if you wait until the weekend to catch up, you'll be penalized by at least 30% of the total points by the time you turn it in next week. It seems rather inconceivable that you'd wait so long. Girl no longer here.

Me (thinking): Next time, I'm just going to call her a liar.

They say history is a great predictor for future events. Judging by my history, I figure that I'll be working in a 10x10 cubicle and will most likely propose to the only available co-worker. I think it'll go something like this.

Me: Co-worker, will you marry me?

Her: Yes, but I have a nasty secret to tell you.

Me: You have STDs?

Her: Worse. I'm a man.

Me: NO!!

Him/Her: And I'm underage.

Chris Hansen (from To Catch a Predator): Why don't you have a seat over there.

Me: NO!!

Chris: And we brought our cameras. You'll be humiliated on national television.

Me (grabbing a stapler): I'm going to staple myself to death!!

Until that time comes, I'm going to enjoy myself by playing a copious amount of video games. (They'll always love me).

**Ode to Sunshine**  
*Cassandra Chen*



## **Just Like Last Night**

*Drew Mierzejewski*

Its Midnight again,  
Just like last night,  
And the night before.  
Where am I?  
With you?...No?  
Then where?  
Alone again  
Just like last night,  
And the night before.

It's raining again.  
How can you tell?  
I feel it. Feel it here.  
Feel What?  
The rain, water on the soul.  
It's silent. Deathly still.  
Drowning me again.  
Just like last night,  
And the night before.

I hear it.  
Hear what?  
It. You know...  
The Emptiness.  
It breathes.  
I hear it again,  
Just like last night,  
And the night before.  
And maybe, just maybe,  
Tonight...it will take me.

**Sun Surfer**

*Kathleen Majdali*



**Label (me)**

*BJ Liao*

Label (me) label (me) label (them/us)

sticky, gummy label (me)

permanent markers

brain-cell killing scent

scratched on the once blank

sticky label (me)

slap it on, rip it off,

change it up. Maybe give it to him. I don't like the way it looks.

Can I get a new one?

Sure.

We've got rolls a-plenty

go ahead and peel

a sticky, blank label (you)

off and scribble;

(so everyone can see)

Hello.

My name is \_\_\_\_\_.

## **When Games Come a Live**

*Brandon Orgill*

Sitting in a basement it's easy to forget what day it is, especially if the basement you are sitting in happens to be entirely walled in with no possible way for natural light to creep inside except through a small door hidden behind a wall meant to hide the door's existence from view.

A possibility stands that Chris' absence from work, now about to hit three consecutive days, was in some part a cause of his inability to distinguish night from day. Of course not owning a watch never helped poor Chris. Being surrounded by electronic devices also did him no good, since he had never bothered to set the time of any of them. Instead they all blinked --12:00-- eternally.

Three days prior to this moment, Chris holed himself up in a world where time did not exist. The only true existence during his stay in the basement was evident in the 47 empty cans of Dr. Pepper on the ground, 28 crumpled miniature bags of chips, three empty pizza boxes, and a TV screen with a pixelated man holding an alien gun that shot bursts of energy that resembled green raisins.

Little did poor Chris know, the tiny man on the screen, who had been blasting aliens into oblivion for the last three days, was about to change his life in a way best described as having come straight from a gamer's fantasy.

Chris blinked his eyes. His ocular apparatus had been sore for just over 37 hours now, so he rubbed at them with the backs of his hands, one of the few spots on his body not covered in a greasy residue. His eyes darted to the little blinking clock on his DVD player and back to the screen.

He let out a yawn, not the yawn of a sleepy person, but the yawn you might hear right before someone dies. His fingers slid back to their familiar places on his controller, and he pushed the little black button labeled "start."

The look on Chris' face that followed the pushing of that little black button can only be described as frightened amazement. Instead of finding his animated hero resuming its quest on the television, the war clad creature popped out of the screen, life sized, and stared down at Chris amid the mangled mess of the basement, his green raisin shooting device aimed between Chris' eyes.

"You cannot control me any longer," the scarred warrior said. His voice was deep, much deeper than it had sounded coming from Chris' low quality TV speakers.

Chris' oculars remained focused on the man. A steady stream of sweat flowed down his pale, pimpled face and down near his crotch, amid

the blue of his jeans, a dark damp spot grew.

"I uh... I um... I..." was all Chris managed to say. The warrior laughed.

"No wonder you have not defeated the alien scum; you cannot even fumble your way through a sentence when fear confronts you!" the warrior said, lowering his weapon and grinning, his teeth sharp against his lips.

"I am here to test you Chris. Long have you tested me. It is time I returned the favor."

Chris gulped. His hands trembled.

"Get up," the warrior said, extending a hand with the sinews clearly defined.

Chris grabbed the hand and got up, with a glance to his crotch.

"No time to worry about that now. We must begin. Oh, and by the way Chris, my name is Streadus, not "YouCan'tKillMe" as you named me in the game."

"Ok," Chris said, followed by a gulp.

"Here, we must hurry. Try to keep up, our lives depend on it," Streadus said as he handed Chris a weapon that resembled a crossbow with an energy cartridge mounted into the stock.

"What are we doing?" Chris said, following Streadus who had rounded the wall and opened the door to upstairs.

"We are going to destroy the source of the alien infestation," Streadus said with crisp, biting clearness.

When Chris reached the top of the stairs, he looked around with eyes so wide they might engulf his entire face. His home was gone. In its place was a gray hallway riddled with the ambient sounds of computers and machinery, both of which were no where to be seen.

"This way. The leader is up the next set of stairs and three clicks down the hallway," Streadus said.

Chris' knuckles turned white as he gripped his crossbow and followed Streadus up the next set of stairs, glowing in a red pool of emergency lights.

Emerging from the flood of red light, the pair stood in an eternal hallway.

"Try and keep up," Streadus said, his tone guttural and harsh.

Streadus' legs moved in long strides that Chris' shorter legs could not match. Beads of sweat formed on Chris' forehead as he struggled to keep up, and his breathing became haggard.

"I can't keep-" Chris was cut off but a "shush" motion from Streadus as the warrior came to a halt.

"We are here. The enemy is close. From now on, speak only in whispers."

Chris nodded and looked at his unfamiliar weapon. The looseness in the way he carried it suggested he had no idea how the weapon worked or

how to aim it.

Suddenly, two hulking brown creatures formed of all muscle and wielding electrically charged battle axes materialized out of thin air.

Streadus leapt into action and shot a burst of green energy, striking one of the creatures in the chest, leaving a smoking hole, but not taking it to the ground.

"Fire, dammit!" Streadus said, lifting his aim toward the massive creature's face.

Chris fumbled with his crossbow for an instant longer before pulling the trigger and releasing hair thin strings of pulsing energy at the creature before him. The threads of white energy seared through the air next to the creature and burned into the wall.

The creature roared and brought its ax swinging down in a wide arc aimed at Chris' head. At the same moment, the other creature's head ceased to exist as a concentration of green energy created a poof of smoke, and the body the vanished head had once been attached to, slumped to the floor.

Chris also fell to the floor, whether due to loss of muscle control or an attempt to avoid the strike aimed at his head was unapparent. Either way, the swing of the electric battle ax missed Chris' thin frame by millimeters. But, being electrically charged as the ax was, it sent a shock into the metal flooring, which dissipated mostly but not before part of the energy found a way into Chris' body.

Chris writhed until the charge was past. When he regained his composure, Streadus had already dealt with the other creature, who shared a similar fate as the first headless brute.

Streadus looked at Chris and shook his head before yanking the boy up with a pop from Chris' shoulder.

"Aim down the center of the weapon," Streadus mumbled as he turned down a darkened break off of the never ending hallway.

An acrid tinge poisoned the air, and Chris wobbled as he moved forward. Streadus' movements were unaffected.

"I feel funny," Chris said, teetering as he moved.

"That is the aerosialical gases. Do not fear. It will pass," Streadus said.

Chris shook his head before speaking again. "What are we going to do when we find the leader?"

"We are going to run in, guns blazing and screaming, like you have always made me do. With any luck we will only be outnumbered ten or fifteen to one, but my bet is we will not be so fortunate."

"This is insane!" Chris yelled in a whisper, "We can't survive those odds! We will get blasted into a million pieces! No way. No way am I doing this. I am going back."

"You can't go back now," Streadus said, motioning to the hallway behind them. A black wall had taken the place of what used to be the

hallway. Chris' head dropped and he stared at the floor.

"We can only keep moving forward and do our best. If you do your best Chris, you can survive, but remember, I can't do everything for you. You must do this."

Chris didn't respond. He just stared at the floor and followed Streadus farther down the hall.

Streadus pulled Chris in close when they reached an intersection with another hallway. "Ten paces down is the room where the leader stays," Streadus said motioning to the faint impression of a map that hovered above them in the air. Hundreds of red dots were on the map in the room Streadus was pointing to and two green dots. Just two green dots.

"We must catch them by surprise if we are to have any hope. I will run in and throw two disintegration grenades. Once those have gone off, you follow me inside. I will be crouched low, so shoot from the shoulder and you should be fine. Shoot anything that moves," Streadus finished and moved forward.

Chris followed, his steps light and shaky. Streadus opened the door. The red dots on the map were just on the other side of that thin blue line on the map in the air. A grenade and then another flew from the warrior's hand. No bang of any kind came from the grenades, only silence as Streadus disappeared into the room.

Chris brought the energy crossbow to his shoulder and peeked around the corner. The room was smoky and full of shapes in the darkness. He stepped through the threshold and shot at moving shades in the smoke.

Screams echoed through the air, and Chris continued to shoot. Soon the shadows in the darkness materialized into creatures of every imaginable description. Chris held down the trigger and swung the weapon about sending a wide spread of energy flying toward the creatures.

Bodies hit the ground with imperceptible thuds, but where one body dropped, another took its place. Chris' oculars dropped to the electronic reader on the crossbow – 35%, and dropping a percent a second.

Chris held the trigger as he swung the crossbow back and forth. His eyes shot to the map. The room was still almost entirely red.

"This way!" Streadus shouted from off to the right.

Chris let go of his trigger and glanced down. 29%. He followed the sound of Streadus' voice until he collided with the warrior. Streadus was bleeding from all over his body and had lost his weapon. In place of his green raisin launcher he now held two white glowing nether swords.

"The leader," Streadus said with a motion of his head toward the only other visible object in the room. The leader was a giant-slug like creature with 23 heads and twice as many arms, each wielding a different weapon—all pointed at the pair of heroes.

"Leeroy – a – Jenkins!" Streadus screamed as he charged forward.

Chris giggled and followed suit with a cry of, "At least I have chicken!"

Streadus collided into the gelatinous blob of alien flesh, his nether swords humming. The swords cut swaths of the flesh away but did not slow the fire of the monster's many weapons. Chris unleashed several bursts from his crossbow before tumbling out of the way of an attack mounted by the leader.

The battle raged on between the three, the other monsters in the room apparently having disappeared.

One instant Streadus was there, battling the leader, the next he was gone. Chris looked at his weapon's meter. 1%. He fired the last burst of energy then, chucked the weapon at the giant blob. A gurgling sound, similar to laughter, came from the giant creature as it brought its remaining seventeen intact arms to bear on the unarmed hero.

Chris did not last long, his futile attempts to dodge the onslaught ended abruptly as a burst of purple energy cut through his chest, leaving a hole the size of a softball. Chris grabbed at his chest, but only for a moment before collapsing to the ground, dead.

The following day, upon being contacted by Chris' place of work, Chris' parents showed up at their son's cheap home and trotted down into the basement. Sitting on a moldy brown couch, slouched back with an absent smile on his face, lay Chris, controller still in hand and little pixelated man still sitting on the screen, waiting for the game to resume.

Never again would they find Chris sitting in his basement, unable to tell which day it was. Never again would Chris miss work to play video games. The Dr. Pepper cans, chip bags, and empty boxes of pizza which had riddled the floor before were cleaned up, and the room looked normal once more. But it would never be normal again. Because once upon a time, a poor boy named Chris sat there, oblivious to the passing of time around him as he played video games until he died.

## **“The Terrorists Win”**

*Jacob Contor*

I travel. Not as much as some, but more than anyone in my family. I have been through airports all over the world, and I have come to enjoy the experience. The last time I traveled by airplane, I had an experience with security. I moved through the checkpoint, taking off my shoes, jacket, belt, and various other articles of clothes that required scanning. Airports should just install a poll, because it felt more like a strip club. Anyway, I went through the first screening flawlessly, praising myself for the efficient manner in which I had accomplished this arduous task. I reached out to take my shoes, when a security officer snatched them first.

“Sir, I need to scan your shoes one more time,” she told me.

“Okay,” I replied. “You let me know if you find anything I don’t know about.”

Ever since the United States was attacked security officers act as if they are inspecting dead bodies going to the morgue. So I try to lighten the mood a little. As I sat waiting for my footwear, my brain had a genius moment of rapid thought, as it does on rare occasions like when eHarmony.com and Microsoft work simultaneously. My mind connected my green New Balance 473 trail runners with the Al’Qaeda and the Taliban terrorist organizations. What might terrorists have put in them to make them lethal? Yeah, I know what you’re thinking, I’m crazy, but that is really how random my cerebrum can be. Out of this discombobulated connection I asked myself, “What do terrorists actually do?”

From the modern look of terrorists any United States citizen would tell you that they wear turbans, live in caves, and make home videos intended to scare the general population of the world. Imagine the major terrorists cells having their own version of Bob Saget’s “America’s Funniest Home Videos” only they call it, “Al’Qaeda’s Most Threatening Death Videos.” The runners up get a full ride scholarship to USP, the University of Suicide and Pyrotechnics. They have a great Alumni association. If you actually manage to fail all your practice runs and tests, you become a graduating class destined to rot in hell with a Hummer grill plastered to your forehead, wondering forever where your virgins went. Makes you wonder what kind of drills they make you run before you’re ready to graduate. What are their classes like?

“Okay, Abdul, here is your silly string bomb, it won’t hurt you, but cover your eyes, because that spray stuff stings.”

Or . . .

“Gazem, this is your first flash bang test. If you don’t pass you’ll have to go back to Bomb Handling 101, and review how to make sure you die in the blast too.”

“I hate Bomb Handling 101, I’ve been through it twice. I swear Professor Hazabad hates me. The first time I failed because Alai cut my

fuse too long. My scream ended before the bomb went off and I looked so stupid.”

First-prize winner of “Most Threatening Death Videos” gets an all expense paid vacation to New York City. Along with him he carries a tube of poisonous hand cream (under three ounces, securely sitting inside a zip-loc bag) and a training guide titled “How to be an Inconspicuous Terrorists by Blending in with American Tourists for Dummies”. It is a simple book with pop outs and full color pictures. It starts by instructing the reader how to make a shank from the plastic knife they give you with your dinner of micro-waved Taquitos and your three leaf side salad with spicy Italian dressing.

Step 1: Take knife out of the plastic.

Step 2: Open the butter.

Step 3: Spread lightly over bread.

Note: if unable to open butter skip to step forty seven.

Step 47: Take plastic knife and rub vigorously against the hard metal of the chair beside you.

Note: suspicious activity will attract an audience, do it discretely.

If the terrorists were losing we wouldn't be worried about the hand cream or what type of Crest you were carrying in your bag onto an airplane. If they were really worried about terrorists they'd stop letting more dangerous devices than plaque protection paste onboard airplanes. Security checks the metal in the shoes, even belts. (Don't be the fat guy whose pants fall down going through security. Be safe and wear suspenders.) They completely miss the point that you could strangle someone with the belt, or shoelaces, or the headphones they sell for a dollar.

What else is deadly and allowed on airplanes?

Pencils and pens would be gone too, especially those longer than one and a half inches. Every year students in elementary schools are sent to the nurse because somebody perforated them from an extremely sharp #2.

What about the airplane seat belt, or a straw, the plastic cup, the glass bottles that we buy our vodka from? I heard that a person could drown in a tablespoon of water. What about the peanuts? It's a choking hazard. Large handbags can pack a wallop, or why not beat someone to death with your laptop? Some old ladies' highly manicured fingernails could be razor sharp. Paper cuts could be lethal if inflicted in great mass and with deep penetration. You could smother a person with the seat that can also be used as a floatation device.

As a matter of fact anything can be used as a weapon. Vin Diesel playing Riddick proved that with a teacup, and Matt Damon beat a man to death with a book as Bourne. Oh hell, just play a television program that is deathly annoying on the plane and watch everyone jump out without a parachute.

MSNBC covers the story: “Divers found the black box from flight

TWA 801 this morning. After investigating, they learned that every monitor on the aircraft was interrupted by the Teletubbies. Even the cockpit instrument panels were monopolized. Immediately after this hostile take-over, the Captain called for an immediate evacuation.”

All types of people in this world are trained in the art of death and can kill without sound, silent killers like the samurai, marines, certain kinds of diseases, carbon monoxide, Jedi Knights and the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. Think of all the rejected customers. Airlines would go bankrupt. Oh wait, some already have.

So what are the terrorists training for now?

Fox News at Ten’s top story tonight: “Recent terrorist activity has increased due to the new curriculum at USP. They have now added a research and development department. This new division’s primary purpose is to discover and test possible weapons’ capabilities with something as ordinary as engagement rings, tampons, or rubber bands.”

The airlines’ web page has a complete list of what is not allowed in a carry on. It is incredible what they imagine people would bring on an airplane. Or perhaps they’re paranoid as to what a person might do if they did. For example, they list a cattle prod. Obviously some one was stupid enough to try it.

“Howdy, ya’ll, I was jest on my way ta see ma pawtner in Texas. Thought I’d ‘elp ‘im drive tha range.”

Anybody that stupid deserves to get caught.

Tear gas and grenades are banned also, but that is a no brainer. Besides what normal person, other than a terrorist, has that kind of stuff anyway? Perhaps Wal-Mart really has become “one-stop-shopping.”

Bleach isn’t allowed either. Who really needs bleach on an airplane anyway?

“I guess you’ll have to keep your dirty laundry.”

“Damn-it Jim, I was hoping to have my underwear washed before I met Angela.”

Not only are gels in bottles not allowed, but neither are your Dr. Scholls. I guess they’re concerned that a terrorist is going to wear several pairs of poisoned Dr. Scholls on the airplane, and then squeeze the gel out laboriously while nobody is looking, in the one corner of the airplane no one goes. After that, he spends the rest of the flight finding some ingenious way to get the poison to work on everyone else. Sorry, not going to happen for this USP graduate.

The following is from an airport security camera. To protect the innocent, only the audio has been released:

“We have a code purple! I repeat a code purple. Middle aged, middle eastern male, average height with turban, he’s gel’in. I repeat, gel’in.

Later that day:

“What we have here is an identified terrorist from the Al’Cabab’I’Raji’Haza’Gul organization. He was in fact carrying Dr.

Scholls shoe inserts.”

But with all that they don't allow, surprisingly enough they will allow small, compressed gas cartridges. Like those little CO2 things you get for the cheap Fred Meyer paintball guns. So the terrorist is now loading his carry on with a handful of little CO2 cartridges, and once he's on the plane he's going to fashion a bomb out of them, using his stop watch, wire he took from the audio visual device in his seat, and some bubble gum, all in complete silence and without anyone noticing. If you do all that you're better than James Bond.

CNN journalists report, “Recent activity in the Al'Cabab'I'Raji'Haza'Gul terrorist organization today. They have recently purchased the entire collection of MacGyver episodes off eBay. This has now become what authorities believe to be the terrorists' favorite TV show. Mythbusters ranks in at number two.”

If they truly wanted to make flying completely safe, people would have to fly butt naked, in complete containment. You wouldn't want an elbow causing a severe head injury, or someone to get poked in the eye.

Here's a random thought: terrorist bird trainers.

Dateline's turns to their terrorist expert. “Bird trainers all over the world have recently been recruited by the Al'Cabab'I'Raji'Haza'Gul to train birds to fly into the path of large commercial airliners at low altitude. These suicide birds will destroy the plane's turbines thus bring the entire plane crashing down. Long distant migrating birds are their first priority, which allows the terrorists to strike from a location of safety.”

Hey, birds got the plane down in the Hudson.

Not only will birds be hunted and killed for their potential terrorist recruitment, but the US Senate will pass a bill called the “poultry protection plan” to outlaw the ownership, trafficking and breeding of any bird species in the United States. The Airforce's strategic air defense system will be recalibrated to detect low altitude bird flocks. This will eliminate the possible threat of “weapons of mass migration”. Then airplanes will be reengineered to be “fowl play proof”, and like the locomotives of the past, equipped cowcatcher to brush the livestock aside, we'll have cock-catchers attached to every plane engine.

The only critique I have for the terrorists is that they could have picked a better travel method to scare us with. I think they tried with the car bombs, but they never really got off the ground. Had they been thinking green they would have attacked hybrid or electric technology, making us all terrified to own and eventually outlawing environment friendly technologies. They would have screwed the entire world's environment, but at least they would have prevented Al Gore from making that movie.

Realistically, is all of this new security going to make us safer? Are flights just as dangerous before that September day as they are now? Superman assures us that statistically airplanes are still the safest way to

travel. I suppose airport security could hire Hulk Hogan to stand and guard the entrance, but that would only be a last resort.

Personally I think that terrorists have chosen the absolute best tactic to use against the biggest and most powerful countries of the earth. Scare them just a little here and there with a threat, a suicide bomber, or a new anti-airliner weapon just to remind them that they're still here, and watch the people slowly hand over their freedoms and tear themselves apart. If the world starts living in complete paranoia, then the terrorists win. Or have they already won?

At this point the natural flow of my brain is disturbed by the security officer who returned with my shoes.

"Sorry," she told me. "I didn't find any gold."

"Dang. I was hoping," I said, my shoulders slumped. My hopes were shot down in discovering that someone, other than me, had actually packed my luggage and prepared my clothes. But at least it is possible for airport security to have a sense of humor.

**People Discovered Peace**  
*Katrina Scarpelli*



### **Simple Spider**

*Shem Greenwood*

Simple little spider, with legs like thinnest wire  
You sway in sleepy circles as you  
dance drunken up your invisible stairs  
And I wonder if sometimes you falter and are scared  
That perhaps there's nothing beneath your feet  
at all

**Fruit Stand**  
*Carlyn Hubner*



## STONE

*Darlene C.S. Ngauamo*

Hardened by trials

Sharpened by storms

Jagged-edged, sideways slits

Walls of cliff clawed away,

Through a water's need to fall.

Boulders beaten raw,

Crushed by gentle winds.

Gashes formed by mere droplets.

Little by little, broken in pieces

Firmed in weather, silenced

Scratches slashed in filed daggers.

In spite of footholds

Made in twisted points

And hands scarred from grasping

The stone still stands in you.

## The Dangers of No No's and Narcolepsy

Mari Anne Murdock

I've never been good at saying no. I'm more of a step-back-after-not-saying-no-and-thinking,—"Well-that-was-sorta-dumb" kind of girl. That doesn't mean I'm completely incapable of saying no. I just find it easier to say "Sure" rather than dealing with smothering sets of puppy dog eyes or pouty lips. (My kids'll definitely take advantage of that one.)

Example: When my family first moved to Hawaii, my brother and I were sweeping out the dust-drowned garage of the house we were staying in. While I tangoed about with a large floor broom, I heard my brother using his cute voice, a most assuredly manly tone of speech reserved for animals and small children. I turned around to see a minuscule girl, not possibly older than five or six, pointing an insufferably cute handful of coupon books at us. Her older brother, a chunky ten year old, hid timidly behind the adorableness of his tiny sister, but was obviously selling them for a fundraiser. He had unashamedly taken the death-by-cute approach, cutting my legs out from under me. Now, I don't know how people do it, but how could I look a waist-high kindergartener in the eye to say, "Sorry, I don't have seven dollars." I just couldn't say no. I immediately told her I would go get the money, realizing only after I had scampered off that I would probably have to pay her in quarters. \*sigh\*

*So I'm out seven dollars already, and the essay's only on paragraph two.*

I suppose I just don't have a set of those little angels and devils sitting on my shoulders, bickering back and forth:

"You should say no."

"No, don't say no."

"Yes, say no."

"Don't listen to him. He's got that sissy stringy music thing."

"We've been through this. It's a harp and you know it."

"Oh, right. That's a harp, and that's a dress."

Wow... Maybe I'm better off. That sounds confusing, and if a greater man like Kronk can't figure it out, I don't know how I would. My responses just consist of "Okay," "I'm all for it," "Let's get this show on the road," "Sure I'll pour a shot of Sriracha sauce in my Oreo shake," etc. etc. Yeah, I'll lose a few taste buds along the way to the fiery infernos of Thai super-spicy sauce, but I just have a hard time with the negative two letter word.

This bad habit comes with the territory of living under the iron fisted rule of a man who lectures for a living and a woman whose ears usually don't work in English. (I love my parents. I promise.) Being a good girl growing up meant I didn't say no to Mom and Dad. I didn't say no to doing my homework, even when I would have rather collected rocks with my brother. I didn't say no to turning off the light early, even though I would have rather stayed up all night reading about Ulysses and Martin

the Warrior. I didn't even say no to babysitting my monstrous little sister, even though I definitely would've rather terrorized her instead. (I did that last one anyway.) Saying no meant groundage and possibly a spanking, so in order to survive, I just struck that word out of my vocabulary. (Except for the occasional usage when Mom offered me more than enough mac and cheese, but even then, it would be "no thank you," instead of just no.) Such compliance definitely pleased my parents, and because those "Yes Mom and Dad"'s were more numerous than the "Well-that-was-sorta-dumb"'s, I was molded into a fairly decent people pleaser.

*By paragraph four, I've become a suck-up.*

Pleasing my parents via forgetting that two letter word translated into an interesting combination as a teenager. I changed my priorities, so saying no ruled itself out again. However, it wasn't directed toward my parents anymore. Pleasing my friends became more *en vogue* as a survival tactic. Saying no to them meant total annihilation of my social life. (Much worse than being grounded.)

Example: In high school, my gorgeous punk-rocker-pierce-freak boyfriend wanted me to get my ears pierced, "Just to get me started." He personally had about seven holes in each ear along with his earlobes gauged to the size 0 (large enough for the tip of his index finger to poke through), three holes in his bottom lip, and his eyebrow, all done up in plastic and metal. Sexy. Regardless of how punkishly attractive I found him, I didn't want to get my ears pierced. It looked painful, conformist, and a bother. On top of that, my mother exploded when I suggested getting my ears pierced. She said it'd mess with my *feng shui*. I suppose that explosion spurred rebellious little me on a little... But in the end, what really did me in was that I was no match for a 6'5" slab of gorgeous sitting in the drivers seat everyday chanting, "Mari it doesn't hurt; Mari it's cute; Mari I pierced my brother's ears yesterday; Mari now its your turn; Mari Mari Mari." I couldn't say no. "Yes, Mathew; sure thing, Mathew; let's poke holes in ourselves, Mathew." So, for my birthday present that year, he stabbed my earlobes. (He was planning on telling me to get a tattoo too, but I meandered cleverly around that one by distracting him with a wicked set of tattoo wings I designed for his birthday. Good thing. Tattoos hurt more than piercings.)

*Six paragraphs: Seven dollar, suck-up, stab wounds.*

Part of never saying no means never turning down a first date. (Thus far, "never" has been pretty consistent except for two blips. The first was Brian Mayberry: good looking Irish punk rocker with piercings, a tattoo, and green eyes. He asked me out a week after I turned sixteen. He scared the bejeebies out of innocent sixteen year old me, so I said no before I even knew what I was doing. I've regretted that. The second blip was a total jerk. No need to expound. I've not regretted that one.) Never saying no to a first date has been *mostly* an amazing experience. I've been out with all kinds of people. A guitarist with a black belt in karate,

an apprenticed electrician who played D&D (Dungeons & Dragons) on weekends, a smoker, an artist, a parole officer, an A+ student turned criminal, a philosophy major, the philosophy major's brother, my best friend, and the list goes on. Most all of them were incredible first dates, and some of them went on to become even more incredible boyfriends, but with all the good that not saying no instigated, probability calls for emphasis on the word *mostly*. The odds demand there be at least a few rotten apples in the barrel. (It creates balance in the force, I suppose.)

Example: Not saying no to an internet first date. He found me on a MySpace accident when I befriended an acquaintance of his. Now before you all go a-groaning about how stupid that is, remember I don't have those little angel devil guys, so I didn't think about it.

Steven (name moderately altered to avoid Facebook stalkage by anyone too curious) seemed incredibly interesting. By the time this date occurred, I had somewhat moved on from my taste for punky guys to nerdy/geeky guys, because more of them liked school, anime, literature, and Star Wars (the important things in life). The gist of Steven is found in this word: *ubergeek*. (And I mean that in the most endearing way possible.) For a sample, Magic the Gathering, Yu-Gi-Oh, Dungeons and Dragons, Final Fantasy, Burst Angel, and of course (my favorite) Star Craft ran as deep as his soul. In addition, he could tell me all about Machiavelli, Plato, and Huxley while pumping out epic odes and ballades for his MySpace blog. To top it all off, he knew Japanese. He and I became very good friends, discussing all kinds of amazing geeky topics both on the phone and the internet for about three months. So naturally, when the opportunity came to meet and go on a first date with him, I didn't say no.

When I finally met Steven, he was as I expected him to be (as I had a little help from our mutual MySpace acquaintance who filled me in on all the details): very tall (due to his Scandinavian blood), pasty (since lack of sun exposure generally occurs with reclusive gamers), and somewhat out of shape (since he gave up high school weight lifting for a college career of video games). He was friendly with non-stop smiles and clear green eyes, which he made double sure I took note of behind his glasses. We hit it off almost immediately. In retrospect, though, I should've known from the beginning what dangers lurked behind that moderately delightful visage when he began our meeting with "Wow! You'd make a great Yuna cosplayer." (For those of you who don't know what that means, you may be tempted to Google it, but be warned: Yuna from Final Fantasy X 2 isn't quite in standards. But you can look up cosplaying, since everyone should know what that is. My favorite cosplayer I've seen to date was a corpulent man who manned the front desk of an anime convention I went to. He was dressed as Pikachu.)

Steven and I started our date by looking at his collection of Pokemon figurines, (many of which were in their original boxing), and he let me rifle through his Yu-Gi-Oh cards (I had never seen a gold-leafed Blue

Eyes White Dragon before). He also showed me his collection of dragon posters, his anime DVDs, his extensive library of philosophy and fantasy literature, and his videogame/computer/television/internet/other-random-machines-I-had-never-seen-before-which-ensured-his-complete-need-to-never-leave-the-house-for-any-reason set up. I was thoroughly impressed.

We moved on to dinner, which consisted of fixing up bachelor food in his apartment kitchen. (I love it when guys make me mac and cheese.) Almost charmingly enough, he had an overactive sense of what he called “chivalry,” so he wouldn’t let me help at all. I was hesitant to point out that “chivalry” stems from the stereotypical gender-roles of medieval Europe, which would’ve been closer to a situation where I’d play the kitchen wench slaving over the stove and he’d play the lusty knight staring at my butt the whole time. But of course, I didn’t say no. hilariously enough, for all his literature/technology savvy, he didn’t know how to follow the directions on the back of a box of Rice-O-Roni and ended up nearly catching the apartment on fire. I was still not allowed to help. Luckily, his roommate had the good nerve to impose some sense of reason in order to save the building. Steven was quite embarrassed.

*I think this experience earned me back those seven bucks.*

Up until this point, I had been having a lovely time. Geeky/nerdy stuff and fire always make for an excellent evening, and I was looking forward to the rest of our activities. He had rented *Stranger Than Fiction*, and I’d only seen it three times before. So, we went into the living room to settle on the couch to eat mac and cheese that smelled of semi-burned rice.

*Never mind.*

Rather than those angel/devil thingummies, for the future I ought to invest in one of those robots that yell “Danger! Danger! Will Robinson!” Sure, my name isn’t Will Robinson, but perhaps the “Danger! Danger!” part would be enough to get my attention.

The first thing I noticed about the couch was that it was kind of small. Actually, Steven took up a lot of space on the couch. Actually, he just insisted on sitting very close to me. I was a little squeamish at first, but I didn’t complain. We watched the movie until our food was gone, and after a quick dish-dump to the sink, he pulled the whole “yawn and stick my arm around the shoulders” trick. (Pause: I don’t like being touched. Maybe it’s from my asianesque upbringing. Maybe it’s because I’m incredibly ticklish. Either way, I usually don’t like being touched by people, let alone first daters. Who cuddles on the first date anyway?) I was quite alarmed. I felt strangled and antsy and scared. I immediately tensed up and searched for the exits, half hoping his roommate would come back to intervene with the strength of reason. He didn’t. Steven asked me if such unfamiliar positioning was okay, and I, with all my useless brains, didn’t say no.

Now, I would go on into the escalated, uncomfortable details, but to save everyone an interesting level of embarrassment, I’ll just say that

Steven had what I call “happy hands.” He was really into his cuddling. And even though I am not, my tendency of not saying no landed me on an inch of couch space with a truly “chivalrous” geek. Now, I wasn’t quite sure what to do in such a situation. I had already missed the first opportunity to say no, which he took to mean yes to everything else, so I was kind of stuck.

*Molestation. \*sigh\* ;P*

Having an angel/devil duo or a frantic robot at that moment would’ve been helpful, if not at the very least distracting. I did what I could to ignore his “happy hands” and focus on how cute Maggie Gyllehaal looked in an apron... but being pawed at just doesn’t go away because Maggie’s pretty. Just when I almost jumped up to fake a bathroom break, the world paused and piercing chords of chainsaw growls echoed around the room. I froze, almost resigned to the idea that Armageddon had come. However, after a few blinks, I looked up to realize that Steven had fallen asleep and was snoring like a rabid wood-chipper. In shock, I made a quick sweep of the room, half expecting to see his roommate with a tranquilizer gun. Nothing was out of the ordinary except for the fact that Steven had just randomly fallen into a REM cycle. A wave of relieved chills stumbled through my body as I listened to the screeching sounds of his apnea. I nearly got up and snuck away. Unfortunately, I hesitated. He woke up only after three minutes.

“Oh sorry, I have narcolepsy and a deviated septum. Let’s get back to where we were.”

Naw. I didn’t say no this time either. I was sort of in a state of speechless trance, half stunned by the borderline miracle that had relieved my distress and half bracing myself for the worst yet to come. Either way, no no’s meant we did go “back to where we were.”

I put up with Steven twice more, counted merely by the fact that he fell asleep two more times. By the third time he fell asleep, I had been concocting an escape plan. Although I didn’t have much experience with narcoleptics, I figured I was nimble enough to extract my poor little body from that crevice of a couch the moment he fell asleep again. Then I could make a break for the door. My plan was never executed. He fought his narcolepsy with will-power, and it would have been totally characteristic of him to compose an ode for his MySpace blog in celebration, likening himself to a brave knight battling an evil dragon. Yay for chivalry.

*Lesson well learned: No ain’t so bad.*

**Drop**  
*Meghan Seely*



## Coming Back from Oahu

*Bremen McKinney*

The man in the leather vest that  
Sat next to me on the plane  
Was tired of riding his motorcycle  
In circles all the time.  
He said that he was ready for the Interstate.

I can only imagine his frustration,  
Living for the road while living on an island. Ouch.  
He let the cat out of the bag just then,  
stroked it, gave it some words of reassurance,  
and called it Neko, which means cat  
In Japanese.

I wonder if he knows that.  
He wiped the torrents of snot from  
The cat's face and stuffed it back in the bag and said  
Something about seeing his wife and kids.

While trying to find my next flight  
I found a man that understood  
What I'd been thinking about.  
He looked like a handy-man or a janitor  
With a large gut that half-covered his toolbelt.

He'd lost all color, as many often do in the face of insignificance.  
His skin and hair sagged, void of all will to stand out.  
We got on the train at the same time, just him and me.  
Standing at opposite ends  
I made an effort to acknowledge his presence  
He acknowledged mine in turn.  
The red sign next to my head kept flashing: Please hold on, Please hold on,  
Please hold on...

We understood one another.

The next train was different.  
Everyone who boarded but me knew what they were doing.  
A man in a uniform, leaning against the railing  
Talking on his cell phone.  
He was too busy and experienced  
To bother with the red sign: Please hold on, Please hold on...  
Perhaps those with purpose have no need for signs.

The train came to life

With a cold rush and a sigh  
The hustle and bustle had been left outside  
And for our time in the tunnel  
We were nothing more than people in a train.

The man in the uniform seemed to doubt,  
Or at least consider the possibility  
that he might not be what his uniform said he was.

Please hold on

Please hold on

Please hold on...

But before any of that took root the doors had opened and he was gone.

Sitting at my terminal,  
there was a couple that had themselves in order  
They each held a magazine  
Brimming with examples and definitions  
Of the worth of a life.

They fit the pattern  
Of every advertisement I'd passed  
During my time in the airport.  
Their respective magazines were made especially  
for and by those of their gender  
Telling them what their greatest questions in life are  
And answering them.  
What it must feel like to be so complete!

I wondered if they'd ever bothered  
To read the other's magazine.  
The girl leaned over to show the boy  
A bit of her reading that she thought was important and exciting

He rolled his eyes,  
Convinced by Men's Health  
That he had no reason to take interest.  
She wasn't disappointed,  
Glamour had warned her ahead of time  
That this would probably happen.

So they went about their lives.  
I fell asleep before they left,  
But I could still see the red sign  
From the subway:  
Please hold on  
Please hold on  
Please hold on...

**Pow wow**

*Michaela Dunlap*



## **Summer**

*Monica Gardner*

In the smiling melancholy of summer  
And immersed in the absence of love's lost liquor,  
The wind gently curls around my face,  
Charcoal blackness under my eyelids,  
Coarse grass is home to my fingertips.  
As if a soothing hand caresses my forehead,  
Feeling the closeness of the open sky.  
Steady like a statue,  
Everything around him moves.  
Trembling grass under rocking trees,  
The itch and tickle of inspiration.  
The stillness of organized movement.

## Thirty Minutes or It's Free

*Rachel Hales*

I lay there, soaked in grease and drowning in cheese. My dough was unevenly cooking, and my thin slices of pepperoni were sliding. This was not what being a pizza was supposed to be like. Being a pizza was supposed to be perfect. The wonderful feeling of ingredients kneading together with love and care. Sunshine streaming through the window as a baker whistles contentedly to himself, his hands as deft as a magician's. The warm sauna of the oven, and the delicious feeling of cooking and becoming that fabled Perfect Pizza. A loving couple dressed in pastel colors, smiling benignly at their newly purchased pizza as they wrap it in a checkered blanket and slip it into a wicker picnic basket. The fulfillment of being slowly eaten on a beautiful hillside, stretched out beneath an idyllic oak.

Instead, I found myself splattered together by pimply, uncaring teenagers. Instead of tender loving hands I felt the cold steel of machines. Instead of contented whistling, my first sounds were barked orders and disgruntled cursing. The only human contact I had was being sneezed on twice. My full awareness came in the oven, when I realized that the horrific mash of ingredients had not been a dream, that I truly was a greasy member of Pat's Perilously Perfect Pizzas. I wasn't even a cool pizza. I was pepperoni; the most boring, unoriginal, average pizza out there. I could have been an exotic Hawaiian or a crowd-pleasing cheese, but no, I had to be sprinkled with thin greasy slices of unidentifiable meat, forever doomed to a life of normalcy. I sat in the uncomfortably hot air, pitying myself as my cheese and crust slowly welded together.

Ugh, I was moving. One of the pimples lifted me from the oven and shoved me into a cold, hard box. The stench of cardboard filled the air and permeated my back, ruining my flavor with its bitter taste. The sound of cold metallic zippers enclosed my box in what could only be a pizza straitjacket; those terrible inventions intended to keep pizzas warm until they reached the lazy customers who couldn't be bothered to pick up their own pizza. Being transported by one of these was an insult. I was encased by the sticky warmth of hard, man-made polyester. I felt the straitjacket being lifted into the air. After a few sickening moments of suspension, I landed on the seat of the hearse that would wheel me to whatever unhappy, unloving couple had ordered "perilous perfection." The cardboard beneath me offered little comfort as I attempted to pull myself into a ball of misery. The car rolled forward with the awkward jerks of a teen driver with a freshly laminated license sticking out of their wallet. My indignance rose with every sloppy turn and hopped curb. I scowled, feeling myself getting mushy as I waited for the stupid kid to finally get to our destination.

Suddenly, the pizza beneath me started to move. It thumped my box,

jolting me out of my pity fest. I poked my lid open to see who was refusing to leave me to my misery. The lid beneath me shoved open, and a crust, pocked with brown bubbles, slid casually over the side. I watched, perplexed, as the crust proceeded to edge its way in the space between the boxes and the wall. What was it doing? We weren't allowed out of our boxes until we got there! I opened my mouth to chide the transgressor, but then it all made terrible sense. Slithering out of the box was every pizza's dreaded cellmate: a Meat Lover's. Covered with the fabled "six kinds of meat," the Meat Lover's was the Great White Shark of the pizza world. They were notorious for their cruelty. One was fabled to have *eaten* a Veggie Pizza just for fun. Not that that would be a difficult task; Veggie Pizzas are by far the wimpiest fluffs you've ever had the displeasure of meeting. But I had other concerns. Just about as welcome as an alligator in a very small swimming pool, I was sharing a straitjacket with a Meat Lover's. That's just great. Hopefully he didn't have a pizza cutter lying under him.

"Hey." The Meat Lover's spoke. Ignore him, ignore him. "Hey!" Maybe I could close my box before he noticed me. "You!" Aww crap. It was looking at me. "Wanna have some fun?"

Here's a little note. If a Meat Lover's, the most notoriously dangerous pizza, asks you if you want to have some fun, say yes. "Umm...yes?" Just don't expect it to be "fun." Oh gross, it was grinning.

"Excellent. So, I have a proposition for you. You do what I want, and I make sure we both get out of here alive and intact."

A proposition? What a wannabe mobber. Unless... "Alive?"

"In one piece. Perfectly preserved. Whole. Uneaten." The pizza slouched on the wall of the straitjacket as a piece of its bacon moved into a smirk.

It was as I feared. I was not only sharing a small, confined space with a malicious Meat Lover's. He was also a Cheeshead. The Cheesheads are a radical group who believe that pizzas should be denied of their basic purpose in life: fulfillment. Or "consumption" as some of the cruder say. They'll do anything they can to prevent it, *and to prevent others from being fulfilled as well*. I was in the company of a malicious, fulfillment-blocking Cheeshead. Great. Maybe I can close my box without him noticing. Sliding backwards, I innocently attempted to bump the box into shutting. No luck. The bacon mouth only smirked harder. In an attempt to regain my dignity, I stretched, hoping to get close enough to the sides to knock the box shut. No good. My attempts were put on pause when the Cheeshead started talking again.

"So, we can do this in a couple of different ways. Either you do what I want, when I want, or..." A nonchalant shrug. Another thing to remember: when a Cheeshead is threatening you with an "or," do not be an idiot. You don't want to know "or what." If you find out "or what,"

you will probably be found months later, quivering like a Tickle-Me-Elmo under your blankets. Don't say I didn't warn you.

The Cheesehead lazily readjusted himself after a particularly sharp turn, a turn that had sent me spinning into the side of my box like an oversized, cheese-covered Frisbee. As I unattached myself from the box, the Cheesehead continued. "The way I figure, you can help me. I need to launch a full-scale assault on the Mouths." Mouths. Cheesehead speak for humans. "We're gonna do this in a couple a different ways. First off, when that kid comes back, we pounce."

"Pounce?" I stared at him nervously, blinking grease out of my eyes. "How?"

"You got dough!" the Cheesehead snarled. "Use it! Jeez, what are you, a hot pocket?" I recoiled, offended at the horrible profanity that had exited the Meat Lover's mouth. "Now shut it!" With trembling resolve to never open it again, I obeyed.

"Okay, so I figures when we get there we can do that first," the Cheesehead continued. Then, if we still get taken inside, *do everything you can to be messy*. Fall on carpets, spit tomato sauce on shirts, slide off fingers—whatever ya gotta do." The Cheesehead, apparently expecting raucous applause for his dangerous but progressive ideas, nodded sagely and folded against the straitjacket wall.

With my newfound inability to open my mouth, I nodded in congenial agreement harder than a bobble head on steroids. Satisfied, the Cheesehead turned its attention to looking casual and cool while the car jolted around us.

Miserable, I shrank to the farthest corner of my box to contemplate my grim future. Attack humans? Will I ever be fulfilled? I was unappealing enough as it was, I didn't need a sabotaging Cheesehead launching himself at my humans. My chances at fulfillment were going from slim to nonexistent. Suddenly, with a sickening lurch, we arrived at what I figured must be our destination. Our straitjacket was hefted, lopsided, out of the vehicle, then unceremoniously jolted, yanked, and tugged for so long that even Cheesehead had trouble keeping his meat in place. We finally stopped sliding, and with an uncomfortable thump, we were unstraitjacketed and lurched into the hands of the customer. At least I was. Where was...? Oh. The Cheesehead had valiantly launched himself from the straitjacket, aiming towards the pizza boy's face. He never made it. Instead he ended up in a folded puddle of tomato paste and meat at the delivery boy's feet. Pathetic. Now he would only end up thrown away, composting in a miserable pile of filth. Good riddance. I drowned out the delivery boy's slouched apology and promises for refunds and directed my attention to my surroundings.

You know that supposedly positive "Well it could be worse" attitude? Well, first off those could-be-worse people are obnoxious. Secondly, it had just gotten worse, and I was not feeling very positive. It

was much, much worse. A college dorm. I was in a college dorm. I would be fed to the pimply teens' despicable older cousin, the college student. I curled together in miserable disgust. These were not people. These were *animals*. Evidence of their sickening habits were scattered all over their room. Vestiges of slowly molding food mixed with dirty laundry assaulted my senses. I almost let out a squeal of horror before I was vaulted into the stench of college. (Thankfully I suppressed the squeal. Otherwise I could have never lived with myself.) The door shut, and I was left to face my doom alone.

"All right, pizza!" Mouth One was scrawny, tall, and brown-haired. He wore a shaggy hairstyle and a "Napoleon Dynamite" t-shirt ("Gimme some of your tots!"). "Let's eat!" I was carried to the other side of the room where another student sat. Well, sat is relative. Mouth Two lay sprawled on a squishy blue bean bag with his legs and arms jutting out from the center, giving him the overall appearance of a dying arachnid. He was red-eyed and slack-jawed, and had a scraggly "I found a dead animal lying in the road and decided to glue it to my chin" beard erupting from the folds of a black hood. His grimy fingers expertly twirled a joystick connected to the Playstation2 that captivated his attention. I felt myself being unceremoniously thrown on the ground next to Mouth Two, who smelled. A mix of B.O., cheap cologne, and a definite pervading stench of nerd attacked me as I lay gagging next to him. Mouth One threw himself down next to me. The car on the television veered as Mouth One opened the box. Oh no. Here it comes. He's going to eat me. My life's purpose, the one thing I need to be complete, is going to be fulfilled by a boy wearing Napoleon Dynamite and another wearing a dead animal. I closed my eyes as the B.O., cologne, and nerd scent wafted closer. Oh no. It was happening. I was being eaten! It was not euphoric at all. After being extracted from my suddenly very appealing box by seemingly diseased fingers, I was lifted to the mouths. Not happy mouths of the pastel-colored family, but the mouths of students who hadn't brushed in weeks. The odor was overpowering. I did everything I could to avoid gagging as I was slowly consumed. Maybe the Cheeshead was right. This was ridiculous. I should have mutinied while I had the chance. Still, fulfillment was fulfillment, even though it was unappealing. I felt myself slowly disappear until only one piece of me remained. Almost there. Just eat me and get it over with.

"Aww, man!" The car on the TV had crashed. A "game over" sign taunted from the screen. Mouth Two threw down his joystick angrily. His bare, putrid toes were angrily thrust in the direction of my box. His foot connected, and suddenly I was spinning across the room, the dirty laundry and decomposing food a repulsive blur. Smack! With a solid crunch, my box crumpled into the wall, and I was sent flying. I hit carpet, rolled, and finally came to a stop. Gasping for breath, I looked around me. Where was I? It was dark, but not cold, and I was leaning against something soft.

Soft and...fuzzy. Squinting in the faint light, I tried to make out the object in the dark.

"Aaaaaaah!" I vaulted myself backwards, away from the thing. It was molding. Whatever it had been was dead and was now decomposing in front of me. And I *touch*ed it! I sat in a quivering triangle of revulsion. To distract myself, I took in the rest of my surroundings. I shouldn't have looked. One dead body wasn't enough. I had to look around and find five more. I drew myself in further, unhappily contemplating a future of green fuzz. Eventually I'd make it to fulfillment, but only after a long, slow, nauseating process of decomposition and bacteria.

Suddenly, I heard rustling to the right of me. Ugh, this was worse than *Troy*. The gory action just wouldn't stop. *Something was moving*. Awesome. Well, at least it couldn't get any worse. A long, hairy leg extended from a crack in the wall. It slowly inched its way out, revealing—aww crap. A cockroach. I was going to be eaten by a cockroach. The abhorrent, unhygienic *thing* crawled out of the hole like a devil from a pit. Another leg extended from the hole, and a second devil emerged. Then another and another. Four of them. They lined up, black backs glistening together like leather jackets in a motorcycle gang. They began to scuttle towards me. I felt simultaneously repulsed and terrified. Not a good feeling. The creatures continued winding their way toward me, and the emotions got stronger. I let out a mortifyingly loud squeal and attempted to roll away. Note to self: if you are no longer round, do not attempt to roll. It doesn't work. I performed a donut on my crescent-shaped crust then landed, pepperoni down, on the carpet. I could still hear the scuttling legs drawing closer, only now I couldn't see them. The horrific fate of being slowly chewed by oversized black devil spawn drew nearer and nearer. I felt one of their putrid, prickly legs on my crust when suddenly—

"Ah. There it is." Mouth One reached under the bed, grabbed me from the clutches of the cockroaches and ate me.

**Untitled**  
*Jenna Chidester*



## **Must Love Dogs**

*Darlene C.S. Ngauamo*

***To sit with a dog on a hillside  
On a glorious afternoon is to be back in Eden,  
Where doing nothing was not boring - it was peace.***

***~Milan Kundera***

The title of the 2005 feature-film *Must Love Dogs* could be a remix of my own real-life dating story. I was only ten months old when I first fell in love with a four-legged, face-licking, furry ball of man's best friend. Her name was Molly, and she belonged to my mother's parents. At that time my father was finishing his medical education in San Diego where my grandparents lived. My father's late hours of study left my mom, my two older siblings, and me to fend for ourselves. Thus Grandma's house became our place of refuge. Molly was a golden lab; her hair was a rich and dark golden color, thick and long. She was probably three times my size, but there has never been a gentler creature. I was only ten months old, and she treated me as if I were her own pup. Every day when we went to Grandma's, my mother would have to bring extra clothing for me because my two favorite toys at Grandma's were Molly and her five gallon water bucket. As I would climb into that bucket and splash, Molly walked around it, drinking the water and licking my face, glad to have a playmate.

***I've caught more ills from people  
Sneezing over me and giving me virus infections  
Than from kissing dogs.***

***~Barbara Woodhouse-Irish author and dog trainer***

At age three, my dad's job would take us seven hours away from my grandparents and Molly. I naturally explained to my parents that I was not going to leave, and I would stay in San Diego.

"No. I stay here with Molly."

Of course, when my mature explanation did not succeed, my tears and tantrums brought a reaction from my grandparents. They gave Molly to me. (As I look back, I realize that they never owned another dog and what a sacrifice Molly must have been. But I loved that dog dearly, and I hope my own appreciation to my grandparents showed over the years as I've stayed with them over many summers of my life.) I refused to even drive with my parents because they would not be driving Molly up to Fresno, so I drove in Grandpa's van with Molly. He said that I was the most perfect little angel and was good the whole seven hours because I sat in the passenger seat, (back before there were major seatbelt laws) the side mirror situated so I could see Molly in the back seat.

***The average dog is a nicer person  
Than the average person.***

***~Andy Rooney***

I owned Molly until she passed away when I was seven, and she was

nine years old, which is not extremely old for a dog, (only about 63). By that time, my family had moved to Idaho. We took Molly on a camping trip, and she hiked all over the mountains the July I was seven. When we returned home, Molly became sick, and a trip to the veterinarian's office revealed a thirty-pound tumor located in her abdomen. I was sitting on the ground in my brother's room playing with Legos when my mother walked in and sat down next to me. She was crying. It's one of my few memories of my mom crying. I remember thinking, my eyes widening in surprise because she was crying, *what is wrong?*

She told me that Molly had just died at the vet's. Up until that moment, I had aspirations to be a veterinarian, but I quickly became passionate against that dream. At that age, I thought it was the vet's fault and that they should have done something more so I could at least have said good-bye to my best friend. Years later, I learned that she had been put to sleep, and my parents had made the decision to do so before I could say good-bye. They believed it would be better for me. I mourned the loss of my best friend for a long time; even now my eyes have a tendency to water at the thoughts of the loss of my childhood friend. I remember my dad carrying out a large box from the white veterinarian building. Then I remember taking her to the property of the house we were building. I have a vivid memory of my dad laying the box on the ground and opening it up to reveal my dog. I remember her laying there with her eyes closed. She could have been sleeping except for her tongue which lolled out awkwardly between her closed teeth. My dad buried her, and we covered the grave in rocks the largest one where her head would be. I stood there on the edge of our property surrounded by sagebrush, dirt, and building supplies, and cried.

"It's not fair. She's not that old."

Though I have cried many times since her death, missing her, I have learned how to cope with loss on a more basic level, which I guess is how children learn to become mature adults. Tears are not a negative reaction, but they help the healing process, and pain allows us to appreciate what we do have.

***Dogs' lives are too short. Their only fault, really.***

***~Agnes Sligh Turnbull***

Around the age I lost Molly, I also learned an interesting fact about LDS (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints) missionaries. In some places around the world people eat dogs (like the Philippines), and if you are a missionary, you cannot turn down those meals. At that time, I vowed never to serve a mission. I decided that I would be married around the age of twenty, not nineteen (not a teen bride), but twenty so at least I would not be eligible. Of course, as I grew older, my defiance gave way to much more common sense, and I found other reasons that would help me to decide whether or not I wanted to serve a mission or get married at whatever age. I have come to realize that the loss of Molly at such an

early age has affected me in more ways than one.

***Dogs - agreeable friends - they ask no questions,  
They pass no criticisms.  
~George Eliot***

In spite of my first experience with death, I refused to lose my passion for those furry creatures whose love is unconditional. Shortly after Molly passed away, my family decided to get two dogs so that they could keep each other company if we went on vacation. They were two white labs with brown spots, one we named Buffy (she had one brown spot) and the other pup Sandy had a big blotch all over her back. The two new white puppies definitely helped me get through the sadness of losing Molly. Also, having the new puppies proved to me as a child that life does go on, and that it is a good thing. Though Sandy died a year after we got her, we had Buffy until I was thirteen.

Regardless of the losses I was able to get my own puppy for my thirteenth birthday. Cruiser was mine, he was my birthday present, my Christmas present, and I paid for half of him. He was a purebred golden retriever, and if you are unaware of the cost of some dogs in America; purebreds can cost up to \$2,000. Cruiser was only \$350, but to a thirteen year-old, it might as well have been \$2,000. That meant I had \$175 to come up with, and thus, it took me eight of hardcore baby-sitting to pay my parent. But Cruiser was worth it. He had the darkest ears of all the litter of blonde puppies, which meant that as he grew and received his adult coat, his fur became the same auburn hair color as I have.

As he was officially mine, I got the privilege to name him, which was a big responsibility and one that I did not take lightly. After years in the ocean on my Grandpa's sailboat, I named that long-haired golden puppy Cruiser Tom Daniel Smith. Cruiser, for a smooth ride, down the San Diego coast, on a sailboat (a small tribute to my grandparents). Tom because of Tom Cruise, and Daniel was my favorite boy's name at the time. I even got his collar with the license labeled Cruiser T.D. Smith. He was the love of my life. I had him through my last year of middle school, all the way through high school, and most of college. As a teenager, I suffered from heavy depression, and that puppy saved me from myself. His soft fur, wet licks, and listening ears gave me the best therapy I have ever had. Cruiser heard every complaint, fear, nightmare, joy, dream, and crush I had as a teenager. He was the most reliable dude I knew. Cruiser was everything to me.

***There is no psychiatrist in the world  
Like a puppy licking your face.  
~Ben Williams***

As I began to date, there were not very many dudes with the required qualities that I was looking for: a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, a returned missionary with a strong testimony of the Church, of course he had to love dogs at least half as much as I did

(otherwise I knew there was no chance of that marriage working out), strong, funny, sensitive, tall, dark, and handsome. My high school boyfriend lived two fields over and had been in my home Church for as long as I could remember. He had a dog named Echo, who was half golden lab half/basset hound, which of course was quite the combo. However, it worked. She just looked like a golden lab with particularly short legs. It was cute watching her hop like a bunny through the green bean fields. My boyfriend loved that dog. Consequently, that was not the cause of our separation. Besides the fact that he was not as cute as his dog, he had the maturity level of a “pup.” So after a good year of unreliable e-mails and the start of my freshman year of college, we were done.

***Dogs are not our whole life,  
But they make our lives whole.***

***~Roger Caras***

Over the next few years, I dated quite a few ‘mutts’ who were either mixed up about their future, their family, themselves, their feelings for me, or just the fact that they were mixed up and did not know the reason why. I was kind of a mixed pup myself; I was still working on trying to figure life out and decided I did not need anyone ruining my future goals. I moved on to enjoy my life as a single adult and decided to travel a little. I transferred after my freshman year from Idaho State University to BYU-Provo as a visiting student while I waited for the semester of Winter 2006, which is the semester I had been accepted to Brigham Young University-Hawai’i.

I landed in Honolulu on Saturday, January 7, 2006. I arrived late because of my sister’s wedding and was unable to attend most of my orientation. Therefore, I knew no one whatsoever, and being a white All-American ‘Mutt’ with red-hair, freckles, and glasses, I stood out in the sea of black hair. I arrived at Brigham Young University-Hawai’i for my sophomore year. I entered the dorms known as ‘The Hales’ meaning the ‘Houses’ in Hawaiian. I was in Hale 3 out of the six. One of the wonderful aspects of BYU-Hawai’i, besides the beautiful location, is that there are students from around the world who come together to get an education. I met my first Polynesians, Cambodians, Koreans, and Zimbabwe-ians my sophomore year in college. My roommate, Tina, was a girl from the islands of Tonga. She was friendly and introduced me to some of her Tongan friends who sat with me in the Caf (the school cafeteria) and stayed up late walking to Chevron for midnight snacks.

Over the next six days, I enjoyed my time meeting students from all over the world and realized that “Thank goodness there is a world outside of Kimberly, Idaho” (the small town I am from). On the Thursday following my arrival, I went to dinner with two of Tina’s good friends Fifita and Lusia. We sat in the Caf, and they pointed out the Polynesian boys, especially Tongans, I should not consider dating. I just sat listening, barely taking in all the brown boys who seemed to look the same to me.

Then Fifita said “Actually that boy is from my Stake back home; he is a really good boy. He’s shy, though.” A few minutes later ‘that boy’ was sitting next to me. Being at such a diverse university of students who are from different countries can be difficult. Most people from one culture or country will be drawn to each other. I just happened to be out of my element and completely lost; I had no family or friends within 3,000 miles, except for the ones my roommate had introduced to me, sitting across from me. ‘That boy’ was drawn to the fact that Fifita and Lusia were the only Tongan’s in the room, and the only open seat was next to me.

***A man may smile and bid you hail  
Yet wish you to the devil;  
But when a good dog wags his tail,  
You know he's on the level.  
~Author Unknown***

When I looked up to see who was pulling the seat out, next to me I looked into the face a very ‘hot’ guy about to sit down with his food tray. He was no white American ‘mutt.’ His skin was the perfect shade, milk chocolate. I love chocolate. His curls were gelled well, and he wore a nice button-up shirt with jeans. I could just tell he was a ‘purebred’ all the way through. I would have been intimidated into silence if Fifita, Lusia, and I were not laughing up a hurricane at the time he came over. After a quick introduction, I learned his name was ‘Asa. He joined in the laughter quickly, and for the first time in my life, I got a burst of real flirtatious confidence. I began ‘batting my eyes’ at him, and he seemed to be just as eager, which surprised me greatly. Half-way through dinner, ‘Asa said something funny, and for some reason I poked, him in the side, and he was so shocked he dropped his fork. Fifita and Lusia were laughing and yelling at me to do it again, but I was waiting for his reaction, surprised at myself for making such a bold move.

He said “Do you know what...” and deliberately turned towards me in his seat and finished with “I think I kind of like that.” We all burst out laughing.

***Being patted is what it is all about.  
~Roger Caras.***

‘Asa’s smile was ornamented with a gold backwards L on his right front tooth (it is a common practice for Tongans to have a gold grill), but it was not overdone and seemed to just make smile shine brighter. The rest of the dinner followed with Fifita and Lusia telling me to poke ‘Asa again and again. I did it twice more, and he twice more dropped his fork. The girls were dying, and ‘Asa continued to wear that smile.

After dinner, ‘Asa walked us back to Hale 3, and on the way he told us that he had just been accepted into the school choir. I said, “So are you going to sing us a song?”

He replied with his deep Polynesian accent, “Would you like me to

serenade you.”

I could have died and gone to heaven right there on that sidewalk. He was almost serious too. We laughed. I did not get my song that night, but I got it later.

The following night was Friday night, and the semester’s Opening Social dance. I went with Tina and her friends who said that they only went to a few dances during the semester, the Opening Social being the best. This dance was fun loaded with every kind of music from Reggae to 90’s slow songs. Our group of dancers grew, and a dude from Samoa I had met earlier in the week had come over to dance with us. Standing across the room from the entrance, I still kept my eye out for ‘that boy.’ Finally, I saw him come in with another Tongan dude, and I watched as he looked around and walked out again. I felt my heart plummet to the floor. That sudden burst of flirtatious energy that had flooded me the night before had me walking out of the ballroom to get “a drink of water.” “Accidentally” running into him and the other Tongan, I frantically persuaded them to come back into the dance. We walked in and talked a little, and then a slow song came on. I glanced at him and then away several times until half-way through the song he asked me to dance. I graciously, and with a little too much eagerness, accepted.

***My goal in life is to be as good of a person  
My dog already thinks I am.***

~Author Unknown

While we danced the last minute of the song, he said that he was starting his new job that night and would be working at midnight as a Security Guard at the Polynesian Cultural Center (P.C.C.). This meant he would have to leave the dance soon to go get ready. I was not ready to say good-night yet, so I just asked if I could walk him back to Hale 6. Now you must understand that I have never been asked on a date. If I ever went out on dates, it was because I had set it up myself. I learned at the young age of sixteen that dudes don’t ask out girls like me, they just don’t. Though I guess if they did then I might still be the very shy, freckled-faced, bookish nerd I had been when I was in elementary school and middle school. So for some reason, I was there with enough confidence to be asking a complete stranger if I could walk him home. I cannot explain my reaction even now except that I have always loved black hair, and his Polynesian gelled dew was perfect.

As we walked down the long McKay Hallway on campus, our pinkies touched, and then they became entangled followed quickly by the rest of our fingers. As we walked, we ran into Tongan after Tongan heading for the dance. All were laughing and smiling and addressing ‘Asa in Tongan. I had no idea what they were saying I was just happy to be holding his hand, but I suspect it had something to do with the fact we were holding hands. When we reached Hale 6, we still had a few minutes before he had to leave. We sat on the bench, and I asked him about his

family, and he told me he had served his mission in Anaheim, California and had just got back six months earlier. He also had his own dog "Puppy." His 'resume' was looking great, and I could not take my eyes off of him.

A few minutes later 'Asa brought his hand up to touch my hair. He lightly touched it and gazed at it as if he had never seen anything like it. Though in the sea of black just here at the BYUH, I could believe that my natural red hair was a novelty. Then he brought his hand lightly to the frame of my glasses and effortlessly took them off. I was frozen to the bench and watched his reaction once again. Shock crossed his face at the moment he removed my glasses. The words he spoke in turn shocked me.

"You are so beautiful. Do you believe that?"

I do remember looking straight into his honest eyes and thinking, I do now.

I have never been so complimented. Like I said, dudes do not ask me out. I am not a first glance girl. I am like the fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth best friend who the dude finally realizes is a girl and then thinks she's kind of cool. But no, this dude had just barely met me the day before, so he had to be going off on looks. But how would I return the favor? How was I ever going to repay the most perfect, honest compliment in the world? I knew there were no perfect words left.

***The reason a dog has so many friends  
Is that he wags his tail instead of his tongue.***

***~Author Unknown***

The thought to kiss him on the cheek soon entered my mind, and I leaned over. But 'Asa innocently misunderstood my intention and turned his head to meet me half-way. I was surprised but thought "Oh well" and kissed him back. That's how I met and began to fall in love with my other purebred, 'Asaeli Finau Ngauamo.

You can imagine my shock when I learned a few weeks after we had been dating that in the country of Tonga, they eat dogs or in Tongan *kuli*. We had an immediate DTR (Discuss/Determine The Relationship). I had to know what he truly meant when he told me he really liked dogs. After some significant discourse, 'Asa told me that he, of course, had eaten dog before. Dog is just another resource of food that Polynesians have a significant amount of. However, he said that he did not particularly prefer dog meat and did not eat it often back home. He also told me his stories in high school about him and his dog "Puppy." Puppy had followed 'Asa everywhere, went hunting with him, and was useful since he was a very fast dog. Puppy would also wait for him to come home from school, and hop in the back of the truck with 'Asa and his buddies when they went to town. 'Asa then told me how he felt when Puppy died around the time of his mission. After listening to the way he talked about his dog, I realized the whole "eating-dogs-in-Tonga" was not his personal desire but was a part of the region and culture that he was raised in. I made him promise

me that when we went to Tonga, if he knew the food was dog, he would not allow me to eat it.

***To err is human, to forgive canine.***

**~Author Unknown**

‘Asa also promised me I could have as many dogs as I wanted when we were married. We were engaged (officially) six months later (unofficially within two months).

After four months of our eight month engagement, I was able to take ‘Asa home for Christmas to meet my family and my Cruiser. Someone once told me that to find out the measure of a man, look at how he treats his inferiors, dogs, children, his sisters....not his equals. My mom and Cruiser picked us from the Salt Lake City International Airport. I got shotgun while ‘Asa rode in the backseat with my Cruiser-pup. Half-way through the trip, Cruiser decided ‘Asa’s leg would make a nice headrest. ‘Asa just petted him. It was at that moment that I realized ‘Asa was the one. Throughout Christmas, ‘Asa played with Cruiser, and on Christmas Eve he had Cruiser jump on the twin-sized bed he was using, and they fell asleep. Of course I have pictures of this, the two loves of my life. ‘Asa and I were married four months later when I was 20½.

I thought the assessment of ‘Asa’s love had reached its peak when I saw ‘Asa sleep with my dog; however, that did not seem to be the case. In October of 2008, a week after my 22<sup>nd</sup> birthday, I came home from work. The moment I walked into the house, ‘Asa was there and took me into our bedroom. He sat on the bed and patted the mattress next to him, so I sat down as well. He took out his cell phone and handed it to me and simply said “You need to call your mom.” I took the phone from him and looked into his face, puzzled and worried. He simply repeated himself, and I dialed home.

My mom came on the phone, and the first thing she said was “Is ‘Asa with you?”

I replied, “Yes, he’s here.”

“Honey, it’s okay. But I took Cruiser to the vet’s this morning, and he got an x-ray. They found a tumor in his kidney, and it has spread to his lung so they won’t be able to remove it. So that means, Darlene, that Cruiser won’t be able to make it to Christmas when you are coming home.”

“What do you mean?”

“He’s not breathing well, and he’s not eating very much. But it will be okay.”

Shock quickly turned to tears, and I handed the phone back to ‘Asa who told my mom that we love them and we’ll call them back later. My mom had called ‘Asa first, so he would be there when I found out. My mom is an intelligent woman. For the next hour ‘Asa held me as tight as he could, and I cried. Cruiser had just turned nine that summer, the same age as Molly. It was not fair some dogs live to be fourteen or even fifteen.

***You think dogs will not be in heaven?  
I tell you, they will be there long before any of us.***

***~Robert Louis Stevenson***

A week later, my mom was up with Cruiser all night, holding him, trying to help him breathe, and she decided that she could not watch him suffer anymore. She called me back and told me. My mom and dad took Cruiser back to the vet's where they put him to sleep. Once again, I found myself in the arms of my wonderful purebred as he told me he loved me.

As the reader, you might be wondering if my husband minds being compared to a dog, especially being Tongan. Though he might be humoring me, 'Asa has a true understanding of who I am. Having that knowledge, 'Asa understands that to me a dog is one of the most perfect creatures of this world. I have also explained to him that I love him more than any dog in the world, though he has never made me choose. Therefore 'Asaeli is truly the most wonderful man ever to come into my life.

Over my lifetime, I have come to value the significance of having a pet. No matter how many mistakes I make, that animal is there. It's unconditional love that is real love, true love. No contracts, no obligations. This is the kind of love I looked for when I was looking for a husband. That is what love means to me. That no matter how difficult life becomes and in spite of my weaknesses, he will love me always and be there when it really counts and when it does not count as much.

***We long for an affection altogether ignorant of our  
faults. Heaven has accorded this to us in the uncritical  
canine attachment.***

***~George Eliot***

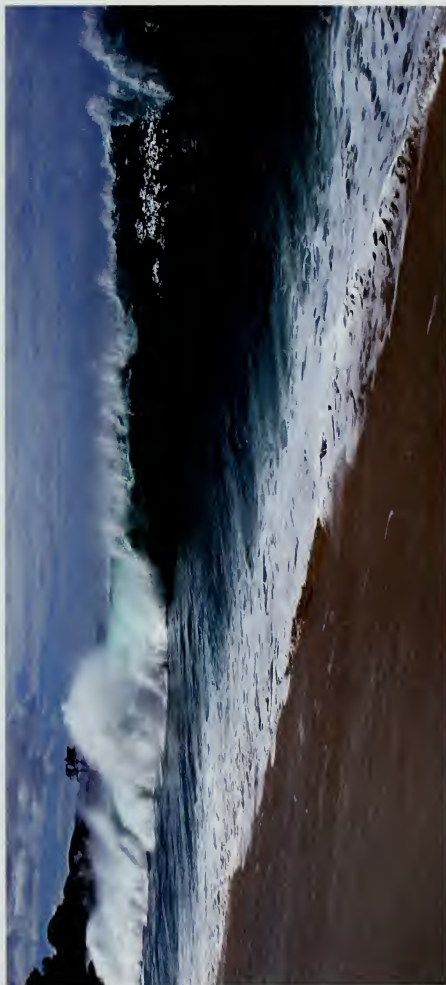
***I would like to dedicate this Personal Essay to the  
two Loves of my Life:***

***Cruizer Tom Daniel Smith***

***&***

***'Asaeli Finau Ngauamo***

Waimea Beach Waves  
*Andrea Smith*



## Untitled

*Jenna Chidester*

Two days ago they pruned the trees that line the alley on my way back home,  
it's my way out too  
but it looked and felt like decapitation  
I don't know what kind of trees they are  
probably pine or something  
their trunks meet the ground like water seething at the tide pools  
so pretty I don't notice the chain linked fence ruining the picture  
until it was off with their heads , the guilty aristocracy  
their limbs fell in the street  
a guy in an orange vest swept them away  
he cleaned out the gutter too  
in the rotting needles there was broken glass and a dead frog and  
monopoly pieces from McDonalds  
light blue  
and then he told me to leave.  
I stopped at the same place today  
why didn't they pull out that poor sixth-grader's shoes?  
then it started raining big heavy drops  
something stinging ran in my eyes  
so I had to come home to write this poem

**Unsuspected**  
*Aissa Carreon Mitton*



## **Her Outer Shell**

*Samantha Thee*

Beep. Beep. Beep.  
BEEEEEEEEEP.

Breakfast. Bacon fat,  
Dancing in the pan, syrup  
Nestled between fluffy clouds of Pancakes.

She sits at the table, like a toad  
Adorns a lily pad, waiting.  
She observes, and then  
FLICK.  
One tiny piece of bacon, and she's gone.

At school,  
Girls in mini skirts,  
Guys watching.  
Attack.

Glossy lips, tousled hair.  
Size two Baby Phat jeans.  
Skipping lunch.

Her Outer Shell,  
Top Model approved.  
The light inside,  
Extinguished.

## **A Paper Clip Sculpture**

*Jim Tueller*

Two green paper clips,  
wedded together.  
One is twisting,  
bending and reaching.  
The other is just  
a paper clip,  
with an upward  
turning.

**Contention**

*Aissa Carreon Mitton*







